

FROM IDOLS TO ICONS

The Rise of the Devotional Image in Early Christianity

Robin M. Jensen



UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS

FROM IDOLS TO ICONS

OceanofPDF.com

THE PUBLISHER AND THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS
FOUNDATION GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGE THE GENEROUS SUPPORT OF
THE JOAN PALEVSKY ENDOWMENT FUND IN LITERATURE IN
TRANSLATION.

[*OceanofPDF.com*](http://OceanofPDF.com)

CHRISTIANITY IN LATE ANTIQUITY

The Official Book Series of the North American Patristics Society

Editor: Christopher A. Beeley, Duke University

Associate Editors: David Brakke, Ohio State University

Robin Darling Young, The Catholic University of America

International Advisory Board:

Lewis Ayres, Durham University • John Behr, St Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary, New York • Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony, Hebrew University of Jerusalem • Marie-Odile Boulnois, École Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris • Kimberly D. Bowes, University of Pennsylvania and the American Academy in Rome • Virginia Burrus, Syracuse University • Stephen Davis, Yale University • Elizabeth DePalma Digeser, University of California Santa Barbara • Mark Edwards, University of Oxford • Susanna Elm, University of California Berkeley • Thomas Graumann, Cambridge University • Sidney H. Griffith, Catholic University of America • David G. Hunter, University of Kentucky • Andrew S. Jacobs, Harvard Divinity School • Robin M. Jensen, University of Notre Dame • AnneMarie Luijendijk, Princeton University • Christoph Marksches, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin • Andrew B. McGowan, Berkeley Divinity School at Yale • Claudia Rapp, Universität Wien • Samuel Rubenson, Lunds Universitet • Rita Lizzi Testa, Università degli Studi di Perugia

1. *Incorruptible Bodies: Christology, Society, and Authority in Late Antiquity*, by Yonatan Moss
2. *Epiphanius of Cyprus: A Cultural Biography of Late Antiquity*, by Andrew S. Jacobs
3. *Melania: Early Christianity through the Life of One Family*, edited by Catherine M. Chin and Caroline T. Schroeder
4. *The Body and Desire: Gregory of Nyssa's Ascetical Theology*, by Raphael A. Cadenhead
5. *Bible and Poetry in Late Antique Mesopotamia: Ephrem's Hymns on Faith*, by Jeffrey Wickes
6. *Self-Portrait in Three Colors: Gregory of Nazianzus's Epistolary*

Autobiography, by Bradley K. Storin

7. *Gregory of Nazianzus's Letter Collection: The Complete Translation*, translated by Bradley K. Storin
8. *Jephthah's Daughter, Sarah's Son: The Death of Children in Late Antiquity*, by Maria Doerfler
9. *Constantinople: Ritual, Violence, and Memory in the Making of a Christian Imperial Capital*, by Rebecca Stephens Falcasantos
10. *The Narrative Shape of Emotion in the Preaching of John Chrysostom*, by Blake Leyerle
11. *Making Christian History: Eusebius of Caesarea and His Readers*, by Michael J. Hollerich
12. *From Idols to Icons: The Rise of the Devotional Image in Early Christianity*, by Robin M. Jensen

OceanofPDF.com

FROM IDOLS TO ICONS

The Rise of the Devotional Image in Early Christianity

Robin M. Jensen



UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS

OceanofPDF.com

University of California Press
Oakland, California

© 2022 by Robin M. Jensen

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Jensen, Robin Margaret, author.

Title: From idols to icons : the emergence of
Christian devotional images in late antiquity /
Robin M. Jensen.

Other titles: Christianity in late antiquity (North
American Patristics Society) ; 12.

Description: Oakland, California : University of
California Press, [2022] | Series: Christianity in
late antiquity ; 12 | Includes bibliographical
references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2021056653 (print) | LCCN
2021056654 (ebook) | ISBN 9780520345423
(cloth) | ISBN 9780520975736 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Art, Early Christian. | Christian art
and symbolism—Medieval, 500-1500. | Image of
God. | Church history—Primitive and early
church, ca. 30-600.

Classification: LCC N7832 .J455 2022 (print) | LCC
N7832 (ebook) | DDC 246/.2—
dc23/eng/20220406

LC record available at

<https://lcn.loc.gov/2021056653>

LC ebook record available at
<https://lccn.loc.gov/2021056654>

Manufactured in the United States of America

28 27 26 25 24 23 22
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

[OceanofPDF.com](https://www.oceanofpdf.com)

*For Wilson Yates, pioneer in the integrated study of
theology and the visual arts*

OceanofPDF.com

CONTENTS

[List of Illustrations](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[Preface](#)

1. [Early Christian Condemnation of Idols](#)

[Minucius Felix's Fictional Dialogue between a Pagan and a Christian](#)

[Other Christian Apologists' Attacks on Cult Images](#)

[Tertullian against Idolatry](#)

[Scripture as a Resource for Anti-idolatry Polemics](#)

[The Gods' Images Themselves](#)

[Defining and Distinguishing Types of Images](#)

[Rituals of Consecration and Material Transformation](#)

[Claiming Common Ground: Philosophers, Apologists, Poets, and Artists](#)

[Conclusion](#)

2. [Aniconism: In Defense of the Invisible God](#)

[Ancient Roman Aniconism](#)

[Jewish Aniconism](#)

[The Problem of Anthropomorphism](#)

[Euhemerism: The Gods Who Were Once Mere Mortals](#)

[The Christian God's Incorporeality](#)

[The Anthropomorphic Controversy](#)

[Aniconic Depictions of the Divine Being](#)

[Conclusion](#)

3. [Epiphanies: Encountering the Visible God](#)

[Humanity as the Imago Dei](#)

[The Biblical God's Human Features](#)

[Biblical Theophanies](#)

[Depictions of God in Early Christian Art](#)

[Christ as the Visible God](#)

[Seeing God in the Resurrection](#)

[Conclusion](#)

4. [Early Christian Pictorial Art: From Sacred Narratives to Holy Portraits](#)

[The Absence of Art in the First Two Centuries CE](#)

[The Earliest Iconographic Subjects](#)

[Artistic Style and Composition](#)

[Avoiding the Cultic Gaze](#)

[The Emergence of Sacred Portraiture](#)

[Conclusion](#)

5. [Holy Portraits: Controversies and Commendation](#)

[Christian Portraits Likened to Pagan Idols](#)

[Fourth-Century Critique](#)

[Fourth-Century Approbation](#)

[Fifth- and Sixth-Century Acceptance and Application](#)

[Conclusion](#)

6. [The True Likeness](#)

[Pagan Parallels](#)

[Evaluating Holy Portraits' Veracity](#)

[Recognizing the Saints](#)

[*The Polymorphic Christ*](#)

[*Early Christian Writers on Jesus's Appearance*](#)

[*Evolving and Divergent Portraits of Christ*](#)

[*Conclusion*](#)

7. [**Miraculous and Mediating Portraits**](#)

[*Portraits Not Made by Human Hands*](#)

[*Miracle-Working Images*](#)

[*Saints' Portraits as Holy Relics*](#)

[*Ritual and Devotional Practices*](#)

[*Other Mediating Images*](#)

[*The Emperor's Image*](#)

[*Conclusion*](#)

8. [**Materiality, Visuality, and Spiritual Insight**](#)

[*The Fourth-Century Material Turn*](#)

[*The Persistence of Pagan Practices*](#)

[*Emphasizing Incarnation*](#)

[*The Emergence of an Imperial Church*](#)

[*Bodily Sight and Spiritual Sight*](#)

[*Participation and Presence in Neoplatonism*](#)

[*Christian Theology and the Power of Sight*](#)

[*Conclusion*](#)

[**Epilogue: The Idols' Last Stand**](#)

[**List of Abbreviations**](#)

[**Notes**](#)

[**Bibliography**](#)

[**General Index**](#)

[**Index of Sources**](#)

[*OceanofPDF.com*](#)

ILLUSTRATIONS

- 1.1 [Mars cameo on sardonyx](#)
- 1.2 [Terra-cotta lamp handle with Zeus Serapis](#)
- 1.3 [Sandstone relief of priest sacrificing to Cybele](#)
- 1.4 [Bronze statuette of Jupiter](#)
- 1.5 [Cybele and Attis relief plaque](#)
- 1.6 [Relief with images of Isis devotees dancing](#)
- 1.7 [Mural of Mars, Casa di Venere in Conchiglia, Pompeii](#)
- 1.8 [Marble sarcophagus relief with a *tensa*](#)
- 2.1 [Sarcophagus from Beth She'arim](#)
- 2.2 [The hand of God, Ezekiel Panel, Dura Europos Synagogue](#)
- 2.3 [The binding of Isaac, Beth Alpha synagogue](#)

- 2.4 [Ivory plaque with John the Baptist baptizing Jesus](#)
- 2.5 [Ivory with ascension of Christ](#)
- 2.6 [Apse mosaic, Sant'Apollinare in Classe](#)
- 2.7 [Dome mosaic, San Giovanni in Fonte baptistery, Naples](#)
- 2.8 [Silver paten from the Treasure of Canoscio](#)
- 3.1 [Mosaic panel showing Abraham's Hospitality, Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore](#)
- 3.2 [Sanctuary mosaic of Abraham's Hospitality and Offering of Isaac, Basilica of San Vitale, Ravenna](#)
- 3.3 [Andrei Rublev, Icon of the Hospitality of Abraham](#)
- 3.4 [Sarcophagus detail of the Trinity Creating Adam and Eve](#)
- 3.5 [Sarcophagus detail of Cain and Abel presenting their offerings to God](#)
- 3.6 [Scenes of Jesus as miracle worker, sarcophagus of Marcia Romania](#)
- 3.7 [Apse mosaic, Church of Hosios David, Thessaloniki](#)
- 4.1 [Oval gem with the story of Jonah](#)
- 4.2 [Glass roundel fragment with shepherd and flock](#)
- 4.3 [Columnar sarcophagus showing Abraham offering Isaac, Jesus giving the Law, and Jesus before Pilate](#)
- 4.4 [Sarcophagus depicting Noah and the three Hebrew youths in the fiery furnace](#)
- 4.5 [Small figurine of Jonah praying](#)

- 4.6 [Glass bowl base with Saints Peter and Paul flanking a column with the Christogram](#)
- 4.7 [Bust of Christ, hypogeum ceiling, Catacomb of Commodilla, Rome](#)
- 4.8 [Christ with Peter, Paul, and the four martyrs, Catacomb of Peter and Marcellinus, Rome](#)
- 5.1 [Saint Agnes on gold glass, Catacomb of Panfilo, Rome](#)
- 5.2 [Saint Paul being led to martyrdom, sarcophagus of Junius Bassus](#)
- 5.3 [Scene of martyrdom, underground shrine and domestic area, Basilica of Santi Giovanni e Paolo, Rome](#)
- 5.4 [Mosaic of Saint Victor, Chapel of San Vittore in Ciel d'Oro, Milan](#)
- 5.5 [Mosaic portraits of Christ surrounded by his apostles, sanctuary arch of the Basilica of San Vitale, Ravenna](#)
- 5.6 [Apse mosaic of Bishop Euphrasius and companions presented to the Madonna and Child with saints and clergy, Euphrasian Basilica, Poreč, Istria](#)
- 6.1 [Triptych with portraits of Serapis, a human male, and Isis](#)
- 6.2 [Apse mosaic depicting Jesus with Peter and Paul, Santa Costanza Mausoleum](#)

- 6.3 [Apse mosaic showing Jesus with Peter, Santa Costanza Mausoleum](#)
- 6.4 [Christ enthroned, apse of the Basilica of Santa Pudenziana, Rome](#)
- 6.5 [Sarcophagus with Jesus giving the Law to Peter and Paul, washing Peter's feet, and before Pilate](#)
- 6.6 [Mosaic panel showing Jesus calling his disciples, Basilica of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, Ravenna](#)
- 6.7 [Mosaic panel showing Jesus on the way to Golgotha, Basilica of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, Ravenna](#)
- 6.8 [Apse mosaic, Basilica of Cosmas and Damiano, Rome](#)
- 7.1 [Panel painting of King Abgar holding the cloth with imprinted image of Christ](#)
- 7.2 [Saint Petronilla leading Veneranda into Paradise, Catacomb of Domitilla, Rome](#)
- 7.3 [Saint Januarius, Catacomb of San Gennaro, Naples](#)
- 7.4 [Fresco of Virgin Mary and Christ Child, saints, and patron, Catacomb of Commodilla, Rome](#)
- 7.5 [The Trial of Christ before Pontius Pilate, Rossano Gospels](#)
- 7.6 [Three youths and emperor, sarcophagus of Catervius and Severina, Cathedral of San Catervo, Tolentino](#)
- E.1 [Marble statue of Herakles with cross on stomach](#)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The ideas that this book presents and the questions that it seeks to answer have been central to my teaching and writing for a long time. However, the notion that most prompted this current work came to me from an undergraduate at Fairfield University who, more than twenty years ago, responded to a lecture of mine on images of God by asserting, rather simply, that idolatry consists not in worshiping images but rather in worshiping images of the wrong god. Since that time, I have explored this idea in various essays and lectures, but what follows here represents my decision to transform that basic insight into a full-length study. This effort became more sustained when I was granted a sabbatical leave from teaching by my university, Notre Dame, and was enfolded into the company

of fellows of its Institute for Advanced Study in the spring semester of 2018. I am profoundly grateful for that release from the daily responsibilities of a faculty member, the productive advice of the other fellows, and the day-to-day support of the institute's staff, all of which gave me a kick-start on this project.

Beyond these good folks, I have many other people and institutions to thank for their generous financial assistance and personal encouragement. I have been able to try out my ideas on students in my classes, colleagues in a working group on the theory of image at Notre Dame's Medieval Institute, participants in annual meetings of the North American Patristics Society, audiences at the Oxford Patristics Conference, and readers of my earlier essays on related themes. I have learned a lot from those interactions and opportunities and am particularly beholden to Robert Wiśniewski, Bryan Ward Perkins, Raymond Van Dam, Carol Harrison, Bronwen Neil, Milette Gaifman, Mikael Aktor, Sean Leatherbury, Adam Levine, Michael Humphries, Wiebke-Marie Stock, Juliette Day, Therese Corey, Jennie Grillo, Felicity Harley, and Diane Apostolos-Cappadona for giving me constructive feedback and friendly critique. Among the most immediately beneficial commentaries came from the anonymous reviewers of an early version of this manuscript, whose suggestions I took to heart and did my best to incorporate.

The push to finish this book was aided immensely by the work of two of my current PhD students, Kelsi Ray and Paul

Wheatley. I also had assistance initially from Madeleine Fentress Teh and later from Bette VanDinther as I prepared the text's final version. The University of Notre Dame's Institute for the Study of the Liberal Arts generously provided a stipend to help pay for the procurement of illustrations and financial assistance for indexing. The Musée départemental Arles antique responded munificently to my requests for permissions and photographs. I also give thanks to Christopher Beeley, the former editor of the Christianity in Late Antiquity series, and Eric Schmidt of University of California Press, who kept me on task; Eric's assistant, LeKeisha Hughes; Cindy Fulton, who oversaw the production of the final manuscript; and Juliana Froggatt, most excellent copy editor. Above all, I must thank my husband, J. Patout Burns, who read early drafts, patiently provided IT assistance, heard me mull over these ideas in countless conversations, and has blessed me more far more than I have deserved with a twenty-five-year partnership.

Finally, in appreciation for their abiding friendship and unequalled contributions to the field of Christian theology and the visual arts, I dedicate this book to my earliest and most influential model and cherished mentor Dr. Wilson Yates.

OceanofPDF.com

PREFACE

God? God don't look like that!

In Flannery O'Connor's short story "Parker's Back," the title character, O. E. Parker, gets an image of God tattooed on his back. Although he does this ostensibly to placate his shrewish wife, Sarah Ruth, when she sees the tattoo of a "Byzantine Christ with all-demanding eyes," she recoils in horror and screams, "Idolatry!" She insists the face cannot be that of God, because "God don't look like that!" When Parker tells her that she can't know how God looks because she has never seen him, Sarah Ruth responds, "He don't *look*," and "He's a spirit. No man shall see his face." In her fury, Sarah Ruth picks up a broom and beats O.E. until large welts rise on his back and disfigure the face of the tattooed Christ.^{[1](#)}

On the surface, O'Connor's story is about a man trying to understand why he is so unhappy, why he married his wife, and why getting new tattoos gives him short-lived

satisfaction. At a deeper level, however, Sarah Ruth's response is consistent with a kind of Christian piety that rejects any kind of religious pictorial art, especially images of God. The tale examines the fear and condemnation of images as well as their spiritual potency. Because Parker's tattoo is on his body, it evokes the idea of incarnation, and at the end, when Christ's face is cruelly disfigured, the reader is reminded of depictions of the Man of Sorrows, and from that moment on Parker himself symbolizes the embodied and suffering Christ.

The story relies on the reader's knowing that certain types of Christians reject religiously themed visual artworks because they regard such things as idolatrous and refuse to allow them in their worship spaces. In denying that one can see the face of God, Sarah Ruth's character loosely quotes the text from Exodus 33:23, in which God denies Moses a glimpse of his face but, significantly, allows Moses to see his back (a connection that O'Connor implicitly makes). These Christians commonly cite the biblical commandment against "graven images" (e.g., Exod 20:4), and they believe that early Christians were strict observers of that prohibition, echoing the sentiments of John Calvin, who insisted that any likeness of God is false and an insult to God's incomprehensible majesty.²

While this view still prevails among many contemporary Christian groups, what they may not realize is that, in fact, early Christian attitudes toward pagan idols had little to do with prohibitions against figurative art. Surviving

documents reveal that most early Christian writers did not regard the biblical proscription of graven images as applying to Christian visual art in any general sense. Similarly, the biblical scenes that constitute the initial subjects of surviving early Christian painting and relief sculpture demonstrate that church authorities did not usually judge these pictorial images as problematic. At the same time, the extant material evidence indicates that Christians initially avoided making images of Christ, the apostles, or the saints that were purely portraits outside a narrative context. They also avoided making freestanding sculpture, perhaps because either of these types would appear too similar to cult images of pagan gods.

Moreover, although early Christian writers ridiculed their polytheist neighbors for worshiping lifeless and impotent objects made from base materials by human hands, they understood that most polytheists did not actually think the statues themselves were divine beings. These writers openly acknowledged that devotees of pagan gods clearly distinguished statues from gods and understood that honors shown to images were intended for the ones depicted. Christian critics also asserted that their judgments of pagan cult images were like those of respected philosophers and so claimed intellectual common ground with them.

The stance of early Christians toward visual art was informed by problems more complicated than the desire to differentiate themselves from naïve pagans who supposedly

worshiped pictures or statues. Among them was a distrust and even disparagement of the sensible or material realm as a means of knowing or encountering the intelligible one, an attitude inherited from classical Greco-Roman philosophers who, like many early Christians, held that the mind was closer than the body to God. Another was the professed Christian belief not just in the invisibility of the Divine Being but also in the spiritual danger of daring to fashion images of a transcendent God who is beyond mortal imagination. Yet another was the issue of how to judge a true likeness of Christ or of the saints and whether such a thing was even possible when no recorded from-life portrayals existed. Far more basically, however, it seems that the problem lay with which god was imaged—whether the true one or one of the false ones.

Even as Christian writers continued their condemnation of so-called pagan idolatry, a dramatic turn toward material forms of Christian practice during the fourth century changed the context as well as the dimensions of the critique. Contemporaneous with the shift in Christian social and political status during the reign of Constantine I (306–37 CE), Christians began to make two-dimensional images of Christ and the saints without narrative contexts, an evolution that corresponds with the rise of the cult of relics and was possibly directly linked to the visits of pilgrims to saints' tombs and sacred places associated with the life of Christ. While such portrait-type images might not have been worshiped or venerated in the same manner as pagan

cult images, and were almost never statues in the round, they do point to a change in the ways that Christians appraised the value of images as instruments capable of facilitating encounters with the holy persons they depicted. Like the emperor's portrait set up to act as his representative presence or the consecrated elements of the eucharist, these images soon served as means of connecting the pious viewer with their heaven-dwelling or otherwise absent models.

Christians did not always welcome or tolerate this emergence of portraits of Christ and the saints: certain bishops, for instance, condemned what they regarded as objects that seemed too much like pagan idols. Nevertheless, alongside other philosophical systems, including late Neoplatonism, Christianity was revaluing the material world and sensory apprehension, and Christians began to regard the visible and tangible world with a new appreciation. The Divine Being was no longer utterly invisible, incomprehensible, or beyond direct human engagement. The belief in Christ's incarnation in a fleshly human body certainly had some bearing on this development, but other influences were also at work, from a reassessment of the dynamics of visual contemplation's effects on memory through the rich elaboration of the liturgy with all manner of material accoutrements to the claim that certain images were miraculously produced without hands or were capable of working miracles themselves.

While this shift can be—and has been—regarded as backsliding into earlier pagan practices and undoubtedly has some parallels with them, it also has a uniquely Christian character. It is based not only in the belief that God came into human form in the Incarnation of Christ but also in a validation of the material world to make the spiritual one perceptible and even accessible, through relics, holy places, liturgical rituals, and images. However, during the time when images of Christ and the saints were becoming acceptable aids to devotion and mediated spiritual encounters with holy men and women, Christians continued their attacks on images of other gods, which changed from purely verbal assaults to physical acts of destruction.

Ultimately, the question was not really about whether images were acceptable or powerful but about whose images, and what kind of images, were to be tolerated for devotional use. Once the threat of polytheism had abated, Christians, no less than their polytheist neighbors, sought and reported visual encounters with the divine and employed images, alongside other material media, to achieve them, since images, of course, are never truly separated from physical objects and their environments. From this power of images arose their perceived danger, over the centuries. And while some concern might always exist about mistaking human-made things for divine or sacred realities, it is also the case that images and their associated objects may simply fall victim to a perceived

need to repress or remove the physical representations of competing religious cults.

OceanofPDF.com

1

EARLY CHRISTIAN CONDEMNATION OF IDOLS

Little children, keep yourselves from Idols.

1 JOHN 5:21

We know that “no idol in the world really exists.”

1 CORINTHIANS 8:4

The assumption that ancient Christians unfailingly and universally condemned pictorial art because they believed it to be idolatrous has endured despite historians' efforts over the past half century to qualify this belief. The notion that early Christians were aniconic (against all pictorial images, especially of the divine) and even iconophobic was fostered by influential Protestant Reformers like John Calvin, who, citing the biblical commandment against graven images (Exod 20:4-5; Deut 5:8), believed that scripture condemns religious iconography, particularly any

that depicts the Divine Being. According to Calvin, Christians avoided making or using any religious pictorial art for the first half millennium of the Common Era, the stretch of time that he judged to be free of doctrinal errors, before the faith degenerated and church authorities allowed pictures to adorn worship spaces.¹

Although the discovery of figurative frescoes decorating the third-century house church in Syria's Dura-Europos and the existence of Christian iconography in the Roman catacombs have proved Calvin's chronology to be off by a couple of centuries, his characterization of an early and pristinely aniconic Christianity has persisted. Much of the persistence of this error derives from centuries of misreadings of Christian apologetic texts that disparage depictions of polytheists' gods, wrongly judged to be sweeping and effective critiques of all types of religious pictorial art. Thus, commentators have presumed, like Calvin, that faithful Christians would have obeyed biblical injunctions against graven images and worshiped in spaces unadorned by figurative decoration of any kind. Accordingly, the third-century emergence of identifiably Christian art would signify a precipitous descent into superstitious idolatry.

Following Calvin, Edward Gibbon's great work, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, written in the mid-to late eighteenth century, describes early Christians as not only aniconic but vehemently anti-iconic:

The primitive Christians were possessed with an unconquerable repugnance

to the use and abuse of images; and this aversion may be ascribed to their descent from the Jews, and their enmity to the Greeks. The Mosaic law severely proscribed all representations of the Deity; and that precept was firmly established in the principles and practices of the chosen people. The wit of the Christian apologists was pointed against the foolish idolaters, who bowed before the workmanship of their own hands; the images of brass or marble which, had they been endowed with sense and motion, should have stepped off their pedestals to rather adore the creative powers of the artist. . . . Under the successors of Constantine, in the peace and luxury of the triumphant church, the more prudent bishops condescended to indulge a visible superstition, for the benefit of the multitude; and, after the ruin of Paganism, they were no longer restrained by the apprehension of an odious parallel.²

Modern historians have echoed Calvin and Gibbon's belief that faithful early Christians avoided making or using religious pictorial art. During the mid-twentieth century, the art historian Ernst Kitzinger portrayed early Christians as otherworldly anti-materialists who vigorously resisted pagan visual culture, arguing that it was "not before the second half of the fourth century that any writer began to speak of Christian pictorial art in positive terms."³ A few decades later Kitzinger modified this slightly, claiming that the early church upheld its "taboo against religious images" until about 200 CE.⁴ Taking a more critical stance, Theodor Klauser, the German historian of Christian liturgy, archeology, and theology, similarly characterized early Christians as resisting their decadent surrounding culture.⁵ Henry Chadwick's 1967 church history handbook includes a chapter on Christian art that cites the anti-idol writing of early church fathers and applies it to religious

visual art in general: “The second of the Ten Commandments forbade the making of any graven image. Both Tertullian and Clement of Alexandria regarded this prohibition as absolute and binding on Christians. Images and statues belonged to the demonic world of paganism.” Chadwick then refers to Irenaeus’s writing as evidence that the only early Christians who possessed images of Christ were “radical Gnostics, the followers of the licentious Carpocrates.”⁶ More recently, Hans Belting maintained that “in the beginning, the Christian religion did not allow for any concession in its total rejection of the religious image” and offered the fact that “images in religious use were in open contradiction to the Mosaic law of the ancient Jews” as an overriding reason for this stance. The church’s eventual acceptance of images, Belting claims, was “an unexpected change from very early and very important convictions.”⁷

Such commonplace perceptions—that early Christians were uniformly hostile to any kind of pictorial imagery and therefore Christian art did not exist (or, if it did, belonged only to heretical groups)—remained fairly consistent among Christian historians until the late 1970s. Perhaps the earliest gainsayer was Sister Mary Charles-Murray, whose 1977 essay “Art and the Early Church” opens with the question of whether the “universally held . . . fact” that the early church was hostile to art “has any foundation in reality.”⁸ Some years later, Paul Corby Finney followed Charles-Murray with an influential monograph, *The*

Invisible God, in which he argues for the early acceptance of visual art by Christians and refuses to attribute that development merely to the accommodation of halfhearted pagan converts or pragmatic capitulation to the surrounding culture.⁹

Those scholars who concluded that early Christian apologists represented the position of church authorities as unambiguously hostile to religious pictorial art consequently attributed the advent of Christian iconography to either the desires of backsliding laity or overly tolerant leaders who grudgingly accommodated it. For them, the incorporation of art in places of worship therefore signaled a disconnect between popular and official religious practices and an unfortunate capitulation to polytheistic habits. Yet as historians like Charles-Murray and Finney have argued, Christian apologists' denunciations of pagan idolatry never attacked works of art per se. Instead, they aimed their censure primarily at a specific type of object: cult images of pagan deities that devotees venerated as if they were the gods themselves. Thus, these early writers did not repudiate religious figurative sculpture or painting in any general sense or regard it as idolatrous; the definition of an idol depended on what or who the object depicted and how viewers regarded and treated it.

MINUCIUS FELIX'S FICTIONAL DIALOGUE BETWEEN A PAGAN AND A CHRISTIAN

In his dialogue *Octavius*, the late second- or early third-century African Latin apologist Marcus Minucius Felix recounts a conversation he purportedly shared with two friends as they strolled along an Ostian beach and debated whose religion was best. Caecilius Natalis opens the discussion by presenting a case for the cult of the traditional Roman deities against the Christian God. Minucius Felix and Octavius Januarius each respond in defense of Christianity's beliefs about the Divine Being. Although this debate, fashioned after and much influenced by Cicero's dialogue *On the Nature of the Gods*, is likely a literary invention, it nevertheless reveals how each side perceived the other's observances and precepts.^{[10](#)}

The pagan Caecilius presents many objections to Christian practices, among them the absence of pictorial depictions of the Christian deity. He contends that this deficiency is objectively perverse and incriminating. Because, he argues, the gods of honorable cults are both public and visible, Christians must be concealing a disreputable or scandalous deity.^{[11](#)} In reply, Octavius admits that Christians do not make images of their god but insists that this is not because the deity is disgraceful but because God is invisible. The Christian god, he continues, does not inhabit a temple, cannot be contained by any human-made structure, and cannot be localized in an earthly dwelling. Although this nameless and invisible god is beyond sense perception, the cosmos abounds with evidence of this divinity's power and majesty.

Inconceivable, infinite, boundless, eternal, and uncircumscribable, this deity has no name other than God.¹² Thus, he asserts, Christian thought corresponds to that of pagan poets and philosophers: they agree that the Divine Being is pure mind, reason, and spirit, indescribable and incomprehensible.¹³

Octavius reminds his pagan friend that they both believe in invisible things: the wind, for instance, and the human soul. Turning to religious practices, he insists that cultivating a pure mind and a virtuous heart is far more devout than offering victims on sacrificial altars. Christians express their devotion and gratitude to their god by doing works of justice or by offering charity to neighbors, not by pouring libations or venerating statues.¹⁴ By this he aims to demonstrate that Christianity is ethically and intellectually superior to polytheism, insofar as it is truer than a cult that involves external objects or ceremonies while simultaneously ignoring the welfare of others or the development of a wholesome interior disposition.

Yet rather than simply claiming that Christianity's lack of images and temples demonstrates its rational and moral superiority, Octavius ridicules visual representations of polytheists' gods. He declares that is it simple minded to offer prayers or gifts to cult images and especially to be beguiled by costly or beautiful objects made by artisans from silver, bronze, ivory, or gold. Worshiping insensate objects crafted by human hands from base materials subject to rust and decay is absurd. Such things can harbor

nests of mice and are often covered with spiders' webs or birds' droppings. The idol makers are themselves lewd, depraved, and immoral.¹⁵ Adding that the gods they depict are oblivious to the fabrication, consecration, and supplication of their portraits, he contends that they are not even really gods at all. They are simply long-dead kings or heroes, enrolled among deities (even against their will) by later generations. Similarly, illusory, ridiculous, and often made from sordid and discarded vessels, their images are in no way sacred.¹⁶ Here Octavius echoes Saint Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians to assert that idols don't actually exist (1 Cor 8:4).

Nevertheless, although he judges that venerating images is a pointless way of honoring the gods and portrays these statues as inert and useless objects, Octavius also claims that such things often become convenient vehicles for dangerous demons who lurk within or near them. When malevolent spirits enter and inhabit such images, they do so to deceive devotees and drag their souls into ruin. They take on the appearances and names of the gods whose images they occupy and whose shrines they haunt. They gorge themselves on the sacrificial offerings. Even verified auguries or oracles associated with cult effigies are contrivances of wandering spirits who are capable of animating entrails, producing oracles, directing the flights of birds, causing loss of sleep, inducing disease, and throwing lives into chaos. By distracting and defrauding

their devotees, they prevent the latter from according proper devotion to the true gods.^{[17](#)}

Perhaps because arguments from Christian scripture would be unpersuasive to his polytheist rival, Octavius never refers to the Mosaic commandment against graven images (e.g., Exod 20:4). Somewhat ironically, he even contradicts Caecilius's favorable description of monotheistic Jews worshiping their God with altars and temples. He insists that Jews did so only in the distant past, before God abandoned them because they had deserted the Law.^{[18](#)} But although Octavius seems to afford little significance to biblical commandments against graven images, his arguments often echo the words of Roman philosophers, when he proclaims that the most acceptable offerings to God are an honest heart, a pure mind, and a clear conscience.^{[19](#)}

OTHER CHRISTIAN APOLOGISTS' ATTACKS ON CULT IMAGES

Although certainly fictional, Octavius's disparagement of polytheists' cult images aligns with attitudes widely espoused by early Christian apologists. Like him, they accentuated the similarity of their views with the negative judgments of philosophers toward those who paid homage to gods' statues. And like Minucius Felix's character, they rarely called upon biblical condemnations of idolatry or vaunted the importance of Christianity's Jewish roots. Even though scattered references to the Decalogue and a

presumed Jewish repudiation of cult images can be found in the writings of Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and Origen, these were not major parts of their theological arsenal against idols.²⁰ More often, second- and third-century Christian writers ridiculed the images of Greco-Roman gods with tropes similar to Octavius's. In particular, they mocked polytheists as gullibly believing that inanimate human-made statues, fabricated by artisans from base materials (e.g., wood, stone, or metal), deserved any form of veneration. Also like Octavius, they cautioned that the statues might be contaminated by malevolent beings.

Christian critics judged that paying homage to material objects fundamentally misunderstands the difference between the unstable, sensible realm and the unchanging, intelligible one—it confuses appearances with reality. Such lack of discernment could be corrected only by retraining patterns of thought, reassessing the nature of sensory perception, and cultivating spiritual comprehension. Yet in this view, the problem was not the images themselves but rather the unwarranted value or intrinsic spiritual power attributed to them. This attribution was delusional in itself, but the delusion was compounded because these objects depicted false or powerless gods. Once again, the gods themselves were not the real problem: devotees endangered themselves by becoming duped by demons who fraudulently took on the appearances and names of those (false) gods.

For example, the second-century apologist Justin Martyr (d. 165) attacked polytheists' practice of offering sacrifices and garlands to what he describes as soulless and dead figures, senseless effigies of the gods cast, carved, or hammered by degenerate and intemperate artisans. Such items, he argues, dishonor and deny the form and glory of the ineffable Deity. He affirms that the true God neither has visible form nor needs the kinds of honors that misguided worshipers offer to statues. Like Minucius Felix, Justin both never expressly cites the biblical prohibition against graven images and claims that wicked demons usurp the images of deities and take the names and appearances of those they depict.^{[21](#)}

Another second-century apologist, Athenagoras of Athens (d. ca. 190), likewise castigated those who venerated images for their failure to distinguish matter from God, the sacred from the profane, or the created from the uncreated. He contended that things known only through the bodily senses are utterly different from what is mentally apprehended, adding that the two are as far apart as artists and their materials. His sharp critique includes a statement that exemplifies the view that created matter is fundamentally incompatible with the Divine Being:

Since the multitude, not being able to distinguish what a gulf there is between God and matter, approach with reverence material idols, are we on their account to come forward and worship their statues when we know and distinguish created from uncreated, being from non-being, intellect from sense, and give each its proper name? If God and matter are the same, two names for the one thing, then we are atheists for not reverencing as gods

stones and wood, gold and silver. But if they are utterly different, as far apart as the craftsman from the materials of his trade, why are we being accused? . . . Even so, with God and matter, it is not matter that has the just praise and honour for the arrangement of beautiful things, but its maker, God. Therefore, if we consider the forms of matter to be gods, we shall be deemed blind to the true God for equating fragile and mortal things with the eternal.^{[22](#)}

Athenagoras evidently believed that his assertion that created matter is incapable of transmitting or representing the Divine Being also had to account for why images of pagan deities appeared to make things happen. It is unlikely, he explains, that dead objects can move themselves; they must have an internal mover. He denies, however, that gods produce these effects in their statues. Like Minucius Felix's Octavius, he claims that malevolent spirits usurp the gods' names and animate these objects.^{[23](#)} Moreover, he says, these demons receive sustenance by inhabiting the images. They are eager to attract worshipers to idols because they consume the blood of sacrificial animals and the fragrant smoke wafting from the roasting flesh of the latter.^{[24](#)}

Clement of Alexandria (150–215) likewise stressed the essential dissimilarity of the material and spiritual realms. Rather than focusing on objects as such, he emphasized the problem of ontological misperception, reflecting the influence of Platonic disparagement of sense knowledge. He argued that since likenesses are inferior to their models, to regard visual representations as real—in any sense—is to mistake tangible things for transcendent

things. In his *Exhortation to the Greeks*, Clement ridicules those who set up blocks of wood or pillars of stone along with images of gods in human form and includes a rare citation of the biblical prohibition against making graven likenesses of anything in heaven or on earth.^{[25](#)} Here he even appears to attack all representational art, describing it in Platonic terms as imitative at best and deceptive at worst. He recognizes that arts can make beautiful objects but maintains that when beauty is applied to the service of false gods, it gives these non-existences unjustified and dangerously seductive splendor.^{[26](#)} In his treatise *The Stromata*, Clement again cites the Decalogue's prohibition of graven images, explaining that it was intended to inhibit overattachment to material things and reiterating his belief that giving homage to sensible things dishonors those that are purely intelligible and immaterial.^{[27](#)} Elsewhere in *The Stromata*, Clement cites the commandment against theft rather than the prohibition of graven images, denouncing those who make images because they steal God's prerogative as the unique creator.^{[28](#)} Clement then has to explain how this god, who prohibited graven figures, could have ordered Moses to make two golden cherubim to guard the Ark of the Covenant (Exod 25:18-21). These, he asserts, were merely allegorical figures and not actual beings, whose features were mystical references to the rational soul and its spiritual repose.^{[29](#)}

Clement's follower Origen of Alexandria (184-253) held views similar to those of his predecessor, but his work as a

biblical scholar took him in a slightly different direction. Origen, like Clement, invoked Jewish reticence about figurative art, citing the biblical injunctions against idols in his refutation of the earlier polytheist Celsus. There he notes Celsus's contention that if, according to Saint Paul, idols were nothing (1 Cor 8:4), there could be no harm in them. Even if they were actually demons, they would therefore be God's creatures and deserve some kind of propitiation. Responding in terms much like those of Minucius Felix and Athenagoras, Origen maintains that if idols are nothing, any association with them is liable to mean association with demons.³⁰ These demons, he says, are invited into gods' statues through rituals, consecration, or other magical arts. Once ensconced, they savor sacrificial foods and gratify illicit pleasures.³¹

TERTULLIAN AGAINST IDOLATRY

Because Tertullian of Carthage (ca. 155–220) produced one of the earliest full-length treatises against idols, his work warrants more extended analysis. His treatise *On Idolatry*, probably written between 203 and 206, is not an apology addressed to outsiders but rather a kind of moral exhortation directed at Christians. While Tertullian includes many of the points made by his contemporaries, he differs from them in certain respects. Among these differences are his definitions of *idols* and *idolatry* and his distinctive attitude toward materiality.³²

Tertullian generally defines idolatry as honoring a deity other than the Christian God rather than confusing material or sensible things with spiritual or intelligible realities. Although he recommends spitting or blowing on smoking altars of sacrifice, he associates idolatrous acts with the sins of murder, adultery, and fornication.³³ In his view, idolaters who entertain false gods and thereby defraud the true one of requisite reverence condemn themselves.³⁴ Tertullian here echoes Paul's admonition that God will hand over to "degrading passions" those with "senseless minds" who trade "the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being" (Romans 1:26, 1:21, 1:23).

Because Tertullian understands idolatry as analogous to other personal sins, he proposes objective or practical remedies. He counsels against taking on activities, like building or repairing temples or altars, that necessitate contact with cult images, and he disapproves of certain professions, from astrology to stage acting—any kind of work in which someone might accidentally engage in idolatry, be it while participating in civic rituals, entering military service, or teaching secular literature. Setting lamps or laurel wreaths before doors, attending the circus or the theater, and even going to the public baths are similarly fraught with danger.³⁵ Tertullian allows certain exceptions, however. He grants that Christians might attend weddings or baby-naming ceremonies, as long as they avoid any sacrifices included in the celebrations.

Similarly, someone may accept a civil magistracy, provided they can exercise the office without attending sacrifices, contracting for gladiator shows, making tax assessments for the maintenance of temples, donning purple raiment and gold insignia, or taking an oath of allegiance.^{[36](#)} Tertullian thereby exhorts self-identified Christians to separate themselves from most ordinary social activities that could create a context for idolatry. The ubiquity of the gods' images set up in public places and in the private dwellings of friends and business colleagues meant that Christians needed to be continually on guard, lest they unwittingly engage in some form of idolatrous behavior. Of course, the fact that Tertullian is so vociferously opposed to these practices suggests that many in his audience were regular participants in the activities he denounces.

Despite all this fulmination against idolatry, Tertullian does not appear to regard most pictorial or figurative religious artworks as idols per se. Yet he does judge the producers of such objects as complicit with idolatry, insofar as their use is potentially idolatrous, whatever the artisan's craft (e.g., painting, sculpture, or weaving) and whether or not the objects have human forms or appearances (e.g., portraits of gods): "For it makes no difference whether a modeler forms the idol, an engraver chisels it out or an embroiderer weaves it, because it is also not important whether the idol is made of gypsum or colors or stone or bronze or silver or thread. For since even without an idol there may be idolatry, certainly, when the idol is present, its

material and formal nature makes no difference, lest one should think that only that must be regarded as an idol which has been consecrated in human shape.”^{[37](#)}

Unlike Minucius Felix but like Origen and Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian appeals to scripture to support his points, including the commandment against graven images.^{[38](#)} In another work, he specifically cites the prohibition in Exodus 20:4 and adds references to Enoch 99:6–7, Isaiah 44:8–9, and Psalms 115:8 and 135:18.^{[39](#)} Also like Clement, Tertullian addresses an apparent contradiction in the Hebrew scriptures in which Moses is ordered to produce a graven image: in this case, the bronze serpent (Num 21:6–9). Tertullian gives latitude to God’s ordering Moses to make this particular object, insofar as it was a type or prefiguration of the cross (John 3:14) that freed humanity from the serpent’s bite.^{[40](#)} Although humans should make no graven images, here it was permissible because God ordained it. Tertullian’s explanation diverges from Clement’s by claiming that the object was both an actual, physical artifact and a figure of the instrument of human salvation (the cross). Similarly, in his treatise *Against Marcion*, Tertullian responds to an adversary’s charge of divine inconsistency on the matter of images by arguing that the Hebrew scriptures allow those that are either curative (like the bronze serpent) or purely decorative (like the cherubim), because they are not objects of veneration per se.^{[41](#)}

Like Minucius Felix, Athenagoras, and Origen, Tertullian judges that the most pressing danger associated with cult images is not so much their foolishness as their attraction to demons. He too believes malevolent spirits are likely to inhabit gods' effigies and take on their names and identities to ensnare devotees' souls. He adds that these spirits gain control of the objects through the rituals of consecration and eagerly snatch up the offerings or sacrifices presented to the intended (but defrauded) recipients. Commandeering gods' effigies along with their names gives demons a platform from which to engage the sensible world and carry out their work.⁴² Hiding behind, beside, or within cult statues, malevolent spirits turn ordinary material objects into highly dangerous decoys.⁴³

Thus, for Tertullian the material realm is not impotent or unreal; it can be both potent and dangerous. When God orders it, as in the case of Moses and the bronze serpent, material may be endowed with a healing power that reveals the might and majesty of the Divine. To reiterate, Tertullian's concern is not that worshipers might mistake physical objects for intangible and transcendent realities. He grants that materiality has the capacity to be rendered powerful as well as dangerous. Therefore, distinguishing what is deceptive and demonic from that which derives from the true God is crucial for those who wish to adhere to the salutary and correct faith. Tertullian thereby views idols as false gods and warns against the dangers posed by their effigies.

SCRIPTURE AS A RESOURCE FOR ANTI-IDOLATRY POLEMICS

As noted above, early Christian apologists rarely cited the Bible to condemn idolatry, even the so-called second commandment (Exod 20:4–5; Deut 5:8), possibly because quoting scripture would not have been persuasive to polytheists. Nevertheless, these writers likely were aware of relevant scripture texts, as they seem to have indirectly referred to them. For example, Minucius Felix's Octavius echoes Isaiah railing against the makers of idols as utterly deluded and doomed to be disgraced or destroyed (Isa 37:19, 42:17, 44:9–20). Other early Christian texts resonate with Hebrew Bible passages that describe idols as lifeless, inanimate, mute, deaf, blind, powerless, and worthless (e.g., Ps 115:4–8, 135:15–18; Jer 10:3–5, 16:20; Hab 2:18–19).

Biblical references to idols vary according to whether they represent existing or nonexistent entities. Sometimes the pagan gods are identified as demons and sometimes as long-dead humans. Occasionally, they are declared to be nothing at all.^{[44](#)} The Wisdom of Solomon, an Old Testament apocryphal book written in Greek in the second century BCE, delivers an especially detailed discourse on the folly of idol makers, who fashion perishable objects to be honored and so construct traps for the unwary. The poet contends that the images perceived as gods' portraits are merely the representations of long-deceased men or living but distant kings wishing to be flattered, an assertion that has resonance with comments of Tertullian, among others.^{[45](#)}

The worship of idols (e.g., *eidolon*), the author says, is the cause, beginning, and end of every evil (Wis 14:12–31):

For the idea of making idols was the beginning of fornication,
and the invention of them was the corruption of life,
for they did not exist from the beginning,
nor will they last forever. . . .

. . .

Then the ambition of the artisan impelled
even those who did not know the king to intensify their
worship.

For he, perhaps wishing to please his ruler,
skillfully forced the likeness to take more beautiful form,
and the multitude, attracted by the charm of his work,
now regarded as an object of worship the one whom shortly
before they had honored as a human being.

And this became a hidden trap for humankind,
because people, in bondage to misfortune or to royal
authority,
bestowed on objects of stone or wood the name that ought
not to be shared. [46](#)

Added to the legislation against the production of graven images in the books of Exodus (20:4–5) and Deuteronomy (4:16–17, 5:8), the fulminations of the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Habakkuk, and the Wisdom of Solomon's warnings mentioned above are a series of biblical narratives that recount the dangers of idolatry. For instance, the episode in which the Israelites first beg Aaron to fashion the image of a calf from contributed golden jewelry and then celebrate it with burnt offerings is not only related at length in the books of Exodus (32:1–25) and Deuteronomy (9:15–21) but also referred to either directly

or indirectly in several other places in both the Old and the New Testament (Ps 106:19–20; Neh 9:18; Acts 7:39–43; 1 Cor 10:7). In the book of Judges, God raises up judges to repudiate the Israelites for transgressing the covenant and disobeying the divine commandment by lapsing into the idolatrous worship of Baal and Astarte (Judg 2:16–25).

Certain biblical figures are conversely rewarded for their refusal to worship idols. While the Exodus and Judges narratives illustrate the consequences of violating God's ordinance against worshiping images, the story of the three Hebrew youths' refusal to bow down and worship Nebuchadnezzar's idol (Dan 3) and the tale of Daniel thrown in the lions' den for refusing to worship the statue of Darius (Dan 6) exemplify God's deliverance of those who have the courage required to obey it. The deuterocanonical book Epistle of Jeremiah (Bar 6) is supposed to have been written to the Jews just as they were being led away to captivity in Babylon, and although it is of uncertain date, it purports to prophesy the kind of idolatry that those heroes of the book of Daniel had to withstand. It offers this admonition: "Now in Babylon you will see gods made of silver and gold and wood, which people carry on their shoulders, and which cause the heathen to fear. So beware of becoming at all like the foreigners or of letting fear of these gods possess you when you see the multitude before and behind them worshiping them. But say in your hearts, 'It is you, O Lord, whom we must worship.'" [47](#)

Several New Testament passages reiterate these principles and demonstrate a continuum of thought in a first-century Jewish context. Paul's Epistle to the Romans declares that those who do not accord God proper glory instead are worshiping likenesses of mortals, birds, snakes, or other animals, exchanging divine truth for a lie by serving creatures rather than the creator (Rom 1:18-25). In his First Epistle to the Corinthians, Paul appears to declare that idols are nothing at all; they do not exist, because there is only one God (1 Cor 8:4-6), so eating meat sacrificed to idols is basically unproblematic. Further on in the same epistle, however, he admonishes his readers to flee from the worship of idols (1 Cor 10:14) and judges the consuming of sacrificial meat to be partaking of offerings to demons (1 Cor 10:20-21). Thus, Paul seems ambiguous about whether idols are unthreatening nonentities or are linked with dangerous demons.⁴⁸ In Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians, he insists that there can be no allowance for idols in the temple of God (2 Cor 6:16). Elsewhere, Paul mentions idolatry as simply one among various sins (1 Cor 5:10-11; Gal 5:20).

The book of Acts records Paul's speech to the Athenians, in which he proclaimed that Christians do not envision their God in an image fashioned by artisans from gold, silver, or stone (Acts 17:29). Later on, Acts reports that word reached Ephesus that Paul was persuading listeners that gods made by hand were false, prompting some panic over the loss of trade for those who made images of the

goddess Artemis (Acts 19:26-27). The First Epistle of Peter, like Paul's letters, includes idolatry among such sins associated with Gentiles as drunkenness and licentiousness (1 Pet 4:3). More briefly, the First Epistle of John simply urges, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21).

Thus, the biblical texts that attack idolatry focus on objects of ritual practices related to deities other than the Lord of Israel and the ways that those practices are implicated in more general moral failure. Idolatry is linked with greed, fornication, jealousy, and strife. In these texts, idolatry is not simply the mistake of foolishly confusing ordinary material objects with immaterial or spiritual realities. It is certainly not about making works of pictorial art. Although scripture affirms that Jews and Christians neither make nor adore images of their god, the primary definition of idolatry is the worship of "false" gods and failing to recognize that the true One demands exclusive devotion and faithful obedience.

THE GODS' IMAGES THEMSELVES

The polytheists' gods were false. Thus, Christian censure of polytheist practices tended to regard any god's image as an idol. Some writers, like the late fourth-century bishop Theodoret of Cyrrhus, citing the second commandment, asserted that idols were forms of nonexistent beings, whereas a likeness depicted something or someone that existed. Although neither was worthy of worship, Theodoret

pointedly defined his terms.⁴⁹ Polytheists, by contrast, had no parallel word for *idol*, even though they would not have regarded all images as sacred. Few surviving artifacts bear specific indications of their purpose or function, and one can assume that their regard almost certainly varied from viewer to viewer and according to context or circumstance.

Moreover, gods' images were ubiquitous in the ancient world. As Tertullian explained, it was difficult to avoid them, no matter where a person went in an ancient Roman city. From the monumental statues of the gods set up in public buildings to mass-produced representations of divinities on small, ordinary household and personal objects such as dishware, signet rings, and terra-cotta lamps (see figs. 1.1 and 1.2), the extent to which these images served any ritual or devotional function is indiscernible without corroborating evidence. Presumably, gods' effigies were set up in temples or sanctuaries and were recipients of cult sacrifices (see fig. 1.3). Multitudes of other cult images, in company with portraits of emperors, military heroes, and civic benefactors, crowded into such spaces as municipal fora, public baths, theaters, domestic gardens, libraries, and markets.⁵⁰ The sheer number of statues and paintings of various deities attested to these deities' presumed existence, but certainly not all were the focus of religious ritual or prayer.⁵¹



FIGURE 1.1 Mars cameo on sardonyx, ca. first century BCE to third century CE. (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Gift of John Taylor Johnston, 1881. Accession number 81.6.123. Open access [public domain].)



FIGURE 1.2 Terra-cotta lamp handle with Zeus Serapis, second century CE. (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan. Accession number 17.194.2115. Open access [public domain].)



FIGURE 1.3 Priest sacrificing to Cybele, sandstone relief from Ostia, now in the Museo Ostiense. (Photo: Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY.)

Therefore, the extent to which an ancient viewer offered veneration to particular gods' images is unknowable. Most likely, many such likenesses were simply ornamental pieces meant for private gardens or domestic atria and prized for their aesthetic more than their religious qualities. They might have signaled their owners' piety, but they also functioned as indications of their possessors' identity, wealth, or social status.⁵² A huge number of others were mass-produced figurines, most without evident aesthetic or material value. Many of these would have been votive offerings that bore the likeness of the god to which they were dedicated. Some were deposited as offerings at shrines, while others may have been kept as portable talismans (see fig. 1.4). For example, the Numidian novelist Apuleius remarked that he carried a small figure of some god with him wherever he went, hidden in his luggage, and that he would take it out to pray and offer it wine, incense, or sacrificial victims on special feast days. When someone accused him of packing something diabolical, he sent for his little portable statue of Mercury to be brought from his home to refute the slander.⁵³



FIGURE 1.4 Bronze statuette of Jupiter, Roman, second half of the second century CE. (Metropolitan Museum, New York. Purchase, The Charles Engelhard Foundation Gift and Rogers Fund, 1997. Accession number 1997.159. Open access [public domain].)

Nonportable statues that were installed in temple precincts would have been meant to represent the gods' presence. An exceptional votive plaque, dated to the second century BCE and now in the National Archeological Museum of Venice, depicts two devotees arriving in such a place to venerate the goddess Cybele and her consort Attis (see fig. 1.5). Here the immortals are far larger than the humans and evidently not images but real divine beings. A first- or early second-century funerary relief found in a tomb along Rome's Via Appia illustrates a similar activity: devotees expressing their adoration for the goddess Isis with ecstatic gestures of veneration before her statue (see fig. 1.6). The seated Isis figure is in the center of a portico with three niches on either side, which contain paired figures of baboons flanking two other Egyptian deities, probably Bes and Patek.[54](#)



FIGURE 1.5 Cybele and Attis relief plaque, second century BCE, now in the Museo Archeologico, Venice. (Photo: Universal Images Group / Art Resource, NY.)



FIGURE 1.6 Relief from Ariccia (south of Rome) with images of Isis devotees dancing, first century CE, now in the Museo Nazionale, Palazzo Altemps, Rome. (Photo: HIP / Art Resource, NY.)

The three-dimensionality of these objects—whether large or small, in private, public, or ritual contexts—contributed to their perceived realism. Depictions of gods’ statues also appear in murals, like the wall painting of Mars from the peristyle of the House of Venus on the Shell or the one of a reclining Venus from the same house (see fig. 1.7). Not only the two-dimensionality of these paintings but also their physical locations suggest that while they depict statues of gods, they are unlikely to have been objects of veneration themselves or even representations of such. As one art historian observes, images of Mars in paintings often look simply like attractive and decorative garden statues.^{[55](#)}



FIGURE 1.7 Mural of Mars on a plinth with lance and shield, from Pompeii, Casa di Venere in Conchiglia (House of Venus on the Shell). (Photo: Manuel Cohen / Art Resource, NY.)

By contrast, those monumental three-dimensional figures that resided in temples or the small figurines that were given as votive offerings almost certainly served some kind of religious or ritual purpose. Moreover, installing deities' statues could be a means of transforming an ordinary space into a sacred one.⁵⁶ However, even then, people who encountered such things might not have seen them as intrinsically sacred. Modern viewers cannot be certain

about the dispositions of specific ancient beholders, yet even the most devout probably did not perceive images as actual gods. The simple fact that they were replicable, destructible, and replaceable would have undermined any such belief.

Even though there is no obvious or reliable basis for identifying which cult statues were most likely to be venerated as gods, one may assume that their occasions of use, ritual functions, and settings would have been relevant, particularly if the image was linked with an altar, adorned with garlands, or presented with votive offerings.⁵⁷ When representations of the gods were processed in carriages, clothed with varying costumes, offered places at banquet tables, or entertained by musicians or mimes, they would be accorded dignity or honors owed to the gods themselves.⁵⁸ Tertullian's mention of a procession of deities into an arena where games were about to be held, loaded on carts for the *pompa circensis*, demonstrates this (see fig. 1.8).⁵⁹ They were not only visible—they were physically manifest in their images and able to appreciate (or spurn) the attentions of their devotees. As Augustine reports, borrowing from a now lost work of Seneca:



FIGURE 1.8 Marble relief from the front of a sarcophagus: youth escorting four horses drawing a cart with a *tensa* (chest for sacred objects), on whose sides are images of Jupiter and of Castor and Pollux. (Restored in the eighteenth century by Antonio Vinelli. Photo © The Trustees of the British Museum.)

Go to the Capitol, however, and you will be ashamed of the lunacy there put on public view and of the offices which deluded madness has assigned to itself. One man submits names to Jupiter; another tells him the hour; another washes him; another anoints him—that is, with empty gestures of his arms he imitates the act of anointing. There are women who do Juno's and Minerva's hair—that is, while standing at a distance not only from the cult statue but even from the temple, they move their fingers in the manner of hairdressers—and there are others who hold up a mirror. There are men who summon the gods to stand bail for them, and men who hand them court documents and explain their lawsuits to them. A leading comic actor of great learning, now a decrepit old man, used to act out a mime each day in the Capitol, as if the gods would take pleasure in watching an actor whom men had long since abandoned.⁶⁰

While this description suggests that these objects served an important religious purpose which elevated them above ordinary artifacts or works of art, it does not contend that the devotees who cared for the gods or tried to entertain them regarded the statues per se as actual divine beings.

Plutarch tells a related story, about a statue set up in a temple that supposedly uttered words as soon as a particular ritual took place. He scoffs at the idea, saying it probably never happened, and goes on to explain instances of statues sweating or bleeding as caused by completely ordinary phenomena, like mold, running paint, or humidity. He allows the popularity of stories about speaking statues but attributes their supposed utterances to fractures or ruptures and argues that because statues have no vocal cords, it is impossible for them to emit articulate speech. He admits that imaginative devotees may wish to believe such tales, but he insists that the deity has no similarities at all to humans, in nature, activity, skill, or strength: God is utterly unlike humans and far removed from them.[61](#)

Most polytheists undoubtedly realized that statues were not actually gods even as they may have viewed certain ones as distinctly venerable, whether by reason of age, beauty, or history. Although not completely identified with the deities they depicted, these images testified to their existence. Thus, no simple distinction between representation and reality is possible, partly because many ancients did in fact believe that images could mediate the presence of transcendent beings and that these beings

were the intended recipients of devotees' prayers, adoration, or offerings.⁶² The link between the deities and their effigies is complicated. Even allowing that their circumstances or settings could vary, these images and the immortals they represent are of different natures: one is made of base materials, inert, mute, and vulnerable to decay, while the other is immaterial, transcendent, and eternal. Yet they are united in some sense, insofar as the model conceptually or symbolically points to the original.⁶³

DEFINING AND DISTINGUISHING TYPES OF IMAGES

Scholars may attempt to distinguish the images of the gods according to terminology found in ancient documents and dedicatory inscriptions, but the ambiguity of this vocabulary renders the task difficult.⁶⁴ The most commonly used Latin words, *imago* and *statua*, are imprecise, as they convey nothing specific about the subject's role in religious cult. This is also true of *signum*, which could be applied to most types of representations. Moreover, any of these terms could denote honorific human portraits as well as representations of deities. Alternatively, the Latin word *simulacrum* seems primarily to denote images that were regarded as sacred objects, but as Peter Stewart warns, Latin diction does not always clearly distinguish cult statues from other kinds of gods' representations.⁶⁵

Greek terminology is similarly ambiguous. A variety of words are used in the literature, including εἰκών, which often functions as the equivalent of the Latin *imago*. Εἰκών derives from the ancient verb εἶκω, which in Homeric Greek could mean “to seem” or “to be something imagined.” The words ἄγαλμα, ἀπεικόνισμα, ἀνάθεμα, and βρέτας appear to be closer to the Latin *simulacrum* and often (but not always) refer to depictions of deities, especially those set up in temples. By contrast, ἀνδριάς was usually applied to portraits of mortals and is more or less equivalent to the Latin *statua*.⁶⁶ Another Greek term, ξόανον, more likely indicates figures carved from wood, and specifically the most ancient, often aniconic, images of sacred beings.⁶⁷

The terminology issue is made more complicated by the fact that ancient authors often referred to cult statues simply by the names of the deities they represented, thereby blurring the distinction between the object and its model.⁶⁸ Even Plutarch noted this potentially confusing practice: “For example, there are some among the Greeks who have not learned nor habituated themselves to speak of the bronze, the painted, and the stone effigies as statues of the gods and dedications in their honour, but they call them gods.”⁶⁹

Nevertheless, the terms used by non-Christian sources hardly ever imply criticism of the objects they describe. There seems to be no exact Greek or Latin term that imputes misplaced veneration or improper regard in the

sense that Christian authors gave to the word *idol*. When Christian authors referred to a polytheistic cult image, they often employed the Greek εἶδωλον or its Latin equivalent, *idolum* or *idolon*. Significantly, these terms are relatively uncommon prior to such use, and when they do appear in earlier classical texts, they primarily denote a reflected image, an image in the mind, an idea, an imagined thing, a delusion, or even a phantom.⁷⁰ Because they do not denote physical objects, they were rarely employed for representations of deities and thus are not synonyms of ἄγαλμα.

The use of εἶδωλα or *idola* to denote cult statues (and with a pejorative connotation) is found mainly in biblical and Christian sources. For example, forms of εἶδωλον occur at least seventy times in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures), in particular as a translation for the Hebrew word *pesel* (typically translated as “graven image”) in Exodus 20:4 and Deuteronomy 5:8 and for many related terms, with mostly negative connotations. Εἶδωλον also appears eleven times in the New Testament, always in reference to abhorrent or polluting images: in Acts 7:41 and 15:20; Romans 2:22; 1 Corinthians 8:4, 8:7, 10:19, and 12:2; 2 Corinthians 6:16; 1 Thessalonians 1:9; 1 John 5:21; and Revelation 9:20.

Although most of their references to cult images were translated into Greek with forms of εἶδωλον, the Hebrew scriptures use a notably large number of words—as many as fifteen in addition to *pesel*—to designate depictions of

deities that the religion of Israel censures. Words like *aven* and *hebel* describe these objects simply as “nothings” (Isa 41:28; Deut 32:21; Ps 97:7), *temunah* as the likeness of some creature or celestial body (cf. Deut 4:12–19, one of the rare instances of such a term not being translated with a form of *eidolon*). Others, such as *gillulim* and *shikkuts*, are more disparaging, alluding to foul impurity (Lev 26:30; Deut 29:17; Ezek 37:23). Still other words, like *atsab*, *massekah*, *nesek*, and *semel*, merely indicate the effigy’s mode of fabrication, as carved from, engraved on, or sculpted from stone or metal (Isa 48:5; Ps 139:24; Deut 4:16, 9:12; Judg 17:4). A few refer to specific gods’ images, like those of Baal (2 Kgs 3:2, 10:27), Nebuchadnezzar’s golden statue (Dan 3:12), or representations (*teraphim*) of ancestral or family gods (Judg 17:5; 1 Sam 19:13).

The Greek word γλυπτός occurs occasionally in the Septuagint, in passages that mention carved or sculpted images (Deut 7:25; Isa 44:9; 1 Macc 5:67). Εἰκών appears in Deuteronomy 4:16 and Romans 1:23 to denote human or animal likenesses that should not be venerated in place of God. Yet εἰκών also refers to the divine image in Genesis 1:17, where it carries a positive sense. In the Greek New Testament, it appears in Romans 8:29, 1 Corinthians 11:7, and Colossians 1:15, to describe humans or the Divine Son as the image (εἰκών) of God. Generally, then, the Greek and Latin words εἶδωλον and *idolum* are by far the most frequently used to identify images that were specifically cult objects or depictions of pagan deities in the Greek

translation of the Hebrew scriptures, the Greek New Testament, the Latin Bible, and later Christian Greek and Latin sources. Moreover, in these contexts these terms are deployed with consistently deprecatory implications.

RITUALS OF CONSECRATION AND MATERIAL TRANSFORMATION

Early Christians, in one way or another, held that the problem with polytheists' cult images mainly lay in their viewers' mistaking human-made representations for deities and thereby confusing external and material objects with eternal and transcendent realities. Yet some also evidently trusted that, by virtue of ritual dedication or consecration, material objects could be endowed with some type of instrumental power. Such rites were believed to transform the images' essential function or nature, either dedicating them to divine service or sacralizing them by invoking the deity they depicted to be in some sense present through or even in them. Rituals of this kind were thus intended to overcome the gap between the material and the spiritual realm by effecting a change in the object's character or status.

Minucius Felix alludes to some kind of consecratory rite in a passage in which his character Octavius asks when in the process of idol making the god supposedly comes into being: "He is being cast, forged, filed; he is not yet a god. He is being adorned, consecrated, supplicated; at long last he is a god, just when man wills him to be and so dedicates him."⁷¹ It seems possible that the author witnessed rituals

in which gods were invited to be present through their portraits—an invitation that could be taken up by more nefarious beings. Here he describes both the viewer's desire (will) and an action (consecration) that would invite the divine presence into the image. This indicates, however, that the object was essentially passive apart from the devotee's supplication.

Tertullian's parallel account of consecration specifically addresses its negative outcomes. He argues that human-made images are in themselves nonentities that can be unintentionally and dangerously transformed when subjected to the consecratory acts performed by priests. Instead of the presence of gods, such ceremonies invoke demons and unclean spirits, who seize the gods' names and inhabit their images.⁷² In usurping these identities, the demons gain access to the souls of the gullible who pay them homage. Tertullian warns that what were once merely material images (*simulacris*), not unlike useful manufactured utensils or other vessels, can be transformed by reckless acts into something potentially malevolent.⁷³

Unfortunately, little evidence exists for ritual consecration of cult statues, at least in Greco-Roman religious practice. Bathing and anointing might have been instances of something like consecration but could simply have been rites of devotion to or even maintenance of revered statues.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, according to Tertullian, such practices only invited gods to be present through images rather than caused a metamorphosis of the material

itself. Ceremonial consecration was also accorded to temples, games, and various religious festivals.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, the expectation was that the statue or other image would become more than what appeared to the eye and something other than merely the material from which it was sculpted. Thus, through a ritual action an ordinary object could become a valid recipient of veneration. It did not replace but merely represented the absent god, who could be present to the devotee in some fashion through the image.

Tertullian's argument points to what may be the most basic reason for censuring pagan cult images: these objects depicted the wrong gods rather than the right one. Tertullian emphasized this by opening his treatise on idolatry with the declaration that the primary danger presented by idols is an entanglement with deities that he judged to be existent but false. He characterized this as akin to fraud (denying the true God, who was due veneration) and adulterous fornication (consorting with someone else's god).⁷⁶ Images were not merely foolish and useless things; they were real and, in certain circumstances (e.g., if inhabited by demons), could be genuinely threatening.

Thus, even as Christian teachers denounced the idolatrous confusion of physical matter with intangible and spiritual reality, a more fundamental problem lay in what the images depicted (i.e., false gods). In truth, most knowledgeable Christians realized that the majority of

polytheists neither worshiped inanimate objects nor were fundamentally confused about the distinction between sensory perception and intelligible comprehension. Polytheists were neither as deluded nor as naïve as early Christian authors' derisive writings portrayed them. In sum, most of the points raised by Christians against cult images should be viewed as more rhetorical than factual, as the next section will demonstrate.

CLAIMING COMMON GROUND: PHILOSOPHERS, APOLOGISTS, POETS, AND ARTISTS

As discussed above, in contrast to older scholarly assumptions, rather than citing biblical condemnations of idols or calling upon the aniconic practices of Jews in their denigrations of pagan idols, early Christian apologists frequently appealed to and even echoed critiques espoused by respected pagan philosophers. By doing so, they aligned their views with those of the intellectually sophisticated contemporaries they wanted to persuade. For instance, when Justin Martyr reproaches pagans for honoring senseless images with garlands and sacrifices and claims that the true God has no form, he questions why, since poets and philosophers offer the same criticism, his hearers would hate or persecute Christians for agreeing with these esteemed thinkers. Justin specifically compares Christian teachings to Platonic and Stoic principles and pointedly comments that when Christians maintain that people ought not to worship things made by human hands, they say

nothing different than did poets like Menander.⁷⁷ Tertullian likewise claims common ground with pre-Christian intellectuals. He expresses this succinctly in his *Apology*, where he argues that Christians should be tolerated no less than philosophers, who are not compelled to make sacrifices or swear oaths. Moreover, even though the latter openly ridicule the gods and attack superstitious religious practices in their writings, they are praised for doing it.⁷⁸

Similarly, Minucius Felix's Octavius unequivocally states that ancient poets and philosophers proclaim—like Christians—that God is nothing but pure mind, reason, and spirit. He asserts that although the terminology might differ, the basic principles are the same from Thales of Miletus to Plato. He concludes that all these respected earlier judgments about the nature of the deities are essentially identical with the Christian position: that the transcendent creator of the universe and architect of the human soul is beyond human comprehension, description, or physical depiction.⁷⁹

Clement of Alexandria's proselytizing *Exhortation to the Greeks* derides the ostensible worship of idols, yet, like Justin, Tertullian, and Minucius Felix, he affirms that his is not a uniquely Christian position, noting that Socrates, Plato, Xenophon, Cleanthes, and the Pythagoreans had long insisted that the deity was incapable of being represented.⁸⁰ In his *Stromata*, he proposes that although poets and philosophers had recognized the folly of

constructing temples or making images of the gods, they derived that knowledge from Moses, from whom they had learned that God cannot be seen.^{[81](#)}

Clement's follower Origen of Alexandria likewise acknowledged that Jews and Christians are not alone in questioning the validity of gods' images. In the first section of his refutation of Celsus, Origen notes that Celsus regarded Christian attitudes toward idols as justified but also far from unique, insofar as their arguments against image worship had already been made by Heraclitus, Zeno of Citium, and others.^{[82](#)} Later in this treatise, Origen summarizes Celsus's defense of his coreligionists. Celsus asserts that Christians have misconstrued the ways that polytheists understand their images of the gods. Only the most naïve, he insists, see such things as divine in themselves. He cites Heraclitus (ca. 535-475 BCE), who compared worshipers venerating statues to simpletons conversing with walls and not knowing which deities they address. Celsus then contends that Christians go too far by despising all images without realizing that such things are merely offerings consecrated to the gods' service and vehicles for directing prayers to their depicted deities. They are not, he insists, deemed to be gods in themselves. Origen responds that Christians, in fact, do know the god to whom they direct their prayers and that this god cannot be addressed through images and is utterly unlike the polytheists' deities, who are, he maintains, merely demons. He adds that those polytheists who know better but simply

pretend to honor the images out of custom set a bad example and, by so doing, encourage ignorant attitudes.^{[83](#)}

Origen's exchange with Celsus not only highlights the nature of the debate but shows that Christian critics likely understood that it was unjust to characterize polytheistic veneration of images simply as the unwitting attribution of life or power to insensate and human-made objects. They appreciated that ancient philosophers argued that although the images were not in themselves living deities, they were means by which devotees paid homage to the gods they depicted. Plato put it succinctly: "We set up statues [of the gods] as images, and we believe that when we worship these, lifeless though they be, the living gods beyond feel great good-will towards us and gratitude."^{[84](#)}

Nevertheless, like Celsus, some pagan intellectuals offered a reasoned defense of the images as salutary, even while subtly criticizing them. Maximus of Tyre, a Greek rhetorician and philosopher who wrote in the late second century CE, made a case for the value of cult images, if only because they prompt the less sophisticated to show reverence toward the deities through an accessible medium. Although he held to the Platonic view that the deity transcends any human appearance, he also espoused a notably accepting attitude toward artistic representations of the gods. Artists, like poets, he declared, attempt to give beautiful and comprehensible shapes to ideas and unseen beings and are thereby able to promote piety and nurture devotion in those who gaze upon their images.^{[85](#)}

Therefore, one could treat a statue as if it were a god while fully aware that it was merely a derived representation. Devotees could offer gifts, prayers, or kisses to the god by offering these things to the god's effigy. If Christians had any grounds for complaint, it was, as Origen argued, that pagans made a pretense of believing otherwise purely out of habit or custom.

These acknowledgments of concurrence with respected philosophical and religious teachings raise the question of what most polytheists really intended when they offered prayers or veneration to cult images. They also suggest that Christian writers were somewhat disingenuous and even defamatory, their mocking phrases instances of rhetorical hyperbole. Contrary to rather naïve modern assumptions about pagan idolatry, documentary evidence shows that the Christian writers who launched these polemics almost certainly knew that they unfairly characterized their polytheist rivals as worshipers of lifeless statues which they believed to be gods. Moreover, the Christian disdain for cult statues belongs to a long-standing tradition of erudite arguments and ridicule found in the works of earlier philosophers, playwrights, and satirists.^{[86](#)} Disparagement of those who believed that statues were gods was a common trope in classical literature, one with which most educated Christians would have been familiar.

Acknowledgements like those from the second- and third-century authors Justin, Clement, and Origen were

reiterated in the fourth century by writers such as Eusebius of Caesarea and Arnobius. They clearly demonstrate that Christians were aware that most polytheists comprehended the difference between representative cult images and actual immortal gods. Yet in many of their writings, this acknowledgment is used for further condemnation rather than for finding common ground. In his *Preparation for the Gospel*, probably written in the second decade of the fourth century, Eusebius provides lengthy summaries of the works of philosophers from Plato to Plutarch to support his judgment that polytheism is a superstitious delusion. In one chapter, he quotes the late third-century Neoplatonist philosopher Porphyry, who argued that only the uneducated regard statues of gods as things made from mere wood and stone. He then references Porphyry's derisory comparison of those benighted souls to illiterates who see written words only as indecipherable letters on paper, papyrus, or wax tablets. Both, he says, fail to discern purely mental concepts in things rendered visible through material forms and signs.^{[87](#)} Against Porphyry's argument, Eusebius refuses to allow that base idols are able to represent ethereal and heavenly things, because, he says, they are utterly unreasonable. For support, he then turns to Plutarch's assertion that making wood or stone statues is a primitive practice and Plato's claim that anything sculpted from lifeless material is unfit to represent the divine nature.^{[88](#)}

A similar explanation is attributed to another polytheist interlocutor, this time reported by one of Eusebius's contemporaries, the Christian apologist Arnobius (255–330), who launched the usual attack on the traditional gods and on their cult images. Significantly, he recognized that polytheists assert that they do not worship images but rather offer worship to the gods by means of the images. But why, then, he asks, should they need images as intermediaries at all? Why supplicate an insensate imitation rather than the deity directly; why supplicate a god by making prayer to something else? Why should it be advantageous to “see” an otherwise unseen god, even if some believed that the likeness somehow mediated the divine presence to the devotee?^{[89](#)} Here Arnobius also asks how the gods were supposed to have entered those objects made by artisans from earthly materials, and he mockingly wonders whether they allow themselves to be shut up in images or dragged into them by rituals of dedication.^{[90](#)}

In a later passage, Arnobius allows that divine images may be merely a condescension to unruly and ignorant folk, who, confronted with such things, might be persuaded to improve their conduct if they believe the gods might thereby see their rude behavior. However, he points out, this strategy (if it existed) had evidently failed, for thieves and other wicked persons robbed the temples and carried off the precious statues with little or no remorse.^{[91](#)}

Such attacks and their rebuttals reveal the complexity of the issue. Even the emperor Julian (the Apostate) insisted

that the cult images were merely aids to the proper veneration of the gods. In words that echo the Christian apologists' critiques, he advised the pagan priest Theodorus that anyone who thinks gods' effigies, made by human hands, are imperishable is utterly foolish. He explained that while things like statues and altars are not to be regarded as gods, they nevertheless symbolize the presence of gods and are aids by which devotees might effectively offer their awe-filled worship:

Therefore, when we look at the images of the gods, let us not indeed think they are stones or wood, but neither let us think they are the gods themselves; and indeed, we do not say that the statues of the emperors are mere wood and stone and bronze, but still less do we say they are the emperors themselves. He therefore who loves the emperor delights to see the emperor's statue, and he who loves his son delights to see his son's statue, and he who loves his father delights to see his father's statue. It follows that he who loves the gods delights to gaze on the images of the gods, and their likenesses, and he feels reverence and shudders with awe of the gods who look at him from the unseen world.^{[92](#)}

In the early fifth century, Augustine likewise understood that polytheists distinguished between veneration of an idol and the transfer of honor to the being the idol represented. Still, he condemned the practice of making images for veneration. In a sermon preached around 404, Augustine railed against those who think they can fashion images of the gods, because they demean themselves by worshiping things lower than themselves. He allowed that these deluded folks believe they can reasonably defend their practices by distinguishing between the objects and the

invisible *numina*, or spirits, of the images. He even offered what he assumed to be their response: “We too know that idols are empty show; but they are not what we worship. . . . [We worship] the *numina* of the idols. We do indeed do homage to what we can see, but we worship what we cannot see.”⁹³ Then, echoing earlier Christian apologists, Augustine retorted that these so-called invisible *numina* are not divine beings lying behind the images but evil demons disguised as gods.

In another sermon, on Psalm 113, Augustine acknowledges that some polytheists deny that they irrationally venerate mundane objects. They claim that they are not deluded, that they honor the deities that the objects represent and not the objects themselves. Nevertheless, he observes, even people who perceive themselves as above such misconceptions or interpret these images as mere signs pointing beyond themselves get entangled in old habits and superstitions. He notes that those who worship a transcendent body like the sun tend to pray to a statue of Sol. Why, he asks, would they turn their backs to the actual sun to pray to a powerless object?⁹⁴

CONCLUSION

Although early Christians’ attacks on idols took several forms, they rarely objected to pictorial art as such. Rather, much of their critique focused on the misapprehension of human-made artifacts for potent spiritual realities. They

argued that sculpted images of stone, metal, or wood are mutable and finite—in every way different from the nature of a divine being. Physical objects, no matter how precious or beautifully worked by skilled artisans, are essentially vulnerable to decay, rust, rot, heat, violence, vermin, and other destructive forces. Such things are intrinsically inferior to divinity, incapable of conveying anything true about a deity. Regarding or treating them as anything else is profoundly mistaken.

At the same time that Christian critics of cult images ridiculed such behaviors and attitudes, however, they clearly understood that most polytheists neither worshiped human-made artifacts nor confused them with divine beings. These critics were cognizant of reasoned justifications for treating such objects merely as signifiers that focused polytheists' rituals and might even facilitate encounters with the represented deities. They also realized that they were not unique in criticizing anthropomorphic representations of deities or in asserting that the Divine Being was essentially invisible and incorporeal. They cannily claimed common intellectual ground with esteemed philosophers on this point. But they continued to accuse polytheists of irrationally venerating lumps of wood or stone and thereby confusing impermanent, external appearances with the stable and purely intelligible realm. Fair or not, these allegations were the basis of most early Christian critique of idolatry.

Yet apart from these somewhat contrived arguments lay a different problem: the gods themselves. To the extent that these were either nonexistent nothings or long-dead mortals, they were harmless and their effigies benign lumps of stone, metal, or wood. Some of these images were likely only decorative objects that displayed their owner's wealth or taste. Yet in Christian apologists' judgment, their very existence deterred people from recognizing and worshiping the true God. Moreover, such images could be rendered dangerous if they were appropriated by malevolent spirits pretending to be gods. Special incantations or magical formulae invoked these fiendish beings, who then inhabited and activated the images. Once ensconced in their false coverings, they fraudulently received the offerings of deluded devotees and reinforced their delusions that these gods existed, were powerful, and should be honored.

Thus, Christian writers' denunciations of idols had little to do with pictorial art as such. They even had little to do with biblical prohibitions of graven images or, in the end, with images of pagan gods. Such objects, whether monumental or mass produced, beautiful or clumsily crafted, were, in principle, harmless in themselves. The trouble arose when they were foolishly mistaken for something they were not and prompted misguided perceptions about or honors shown to the deities they supposedly depicted.

2

ANICONISM

In Defense of the Invisible God

No one has ever seen God.

JOHN 1:18

Nothing that is visible is good.

IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH, *EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS* 3

As discussed in chapter 1, early Christian documents that disparage pagan idols mainly direct their critique at human-made artifacts fashioned from earthly materials which merely represent—but can never be—what they portray. Generally, Christian authors did not view matter as intrinsically evil, even though they decisively rejected materially fabricated representations of pagan deities. As mere physical objects, these were inanimate, impotent, and foolish, and the gods they portrayed were either long-dead

humans, nonexistent, or demons. Confused worshipers, these authors argued, mistook the images for what they depicted, and what they depicted might be malevolent spirits. Yet a different issue also pertains, which this chapter addresses: the abiding conviction, among Christians and non-Christian philosophers alike, that the Divine Being is utterly imperceptible. In the words of Saint Paul's Epistle to the Romans, although the cosmos is pervaded by evidence of God's existence, God's eternal power and divine nature are intrinsically invisible (Rom 1:20). Echoing this phrase, Minucius Felix's title character, Octavius, declares that the Christian God is beyond comprehension or description: a boundless and infinite being who is too pure for human sight and cannot be known through the bodily senses. Like the human soul, which is necessary for life, God cannot be beheld or grasped, and this, Octavius adds, is why Christians believe in him.^{[1](#)}

Most early Christian critics of idols similarly maintained that the true God is indiscernible with bodily eyes and even unimaginable in the mind. This is why one cannot make images of the deity. They also allowed that Christianity was not unique in asserting this. For example, the second-century CE Athenian apologist Athenagoras recognized that Christians used many of the same terms to describe God (e.g., *immutable*, *incorporeal*, *inexpressible*, *invisible*) as philosophers had done before him, although he insisted that Christian teaching about God was truer and more

complete than theirs. Athenagoras nonetheless also identified certain archaic religious traditions that held a proper, aniconic (imageless) understanding of the deity. Arguing that cult images were a relatively new innovation of polytheists, developed only after the invention of drawing and sculpture, he concluded that no existing depictions of pagan deities could be truly ancient. Artists like Theodorus, Telecles, and Smilis had to manufacture portraits of the gods because they lacked preexistent models. Athenagoras added that reproducing likenesses of real gods would be impossible, because they don't have any.² A true deity is inexpressible and even unimaginable.

ANCIENT ROMAN ANICONISM

Like Athenagoras, other early Christian writers asserted a preexistent ancient aniconism and portrayed Christianity as within the venerable tradition of a purer, imageless religion. Clement of Alexandria states that Numa (715–673 BCE), the first king of Rome, prohibited his subjects from making any images of the deity in human or animal form and taught that God was perceptible only to the mind. Clement describes Numa as a follower of Pythagoras, who was in turn instructed by Moses's teachings. Therefore, he contends, no divine images existed in Rome during the first 170 years of its existence. From Rome, he adds, this teaching went to Greece and thence to the rest of the inhabited world, including Persia, the home of the Magi

who foretold the birth of Christ and followed a star to pay him homage.³

Clement's source for this tradition regarding Numa may have been Plutarch, whose *Life of Numa* tells a similar story: that influenced by Pythagorean philosophy, Numa forbade any images of the gods.⁴ Clement acknowledges that Socrates, Plato, Xenophon, Cleanthes, the Pythagoreans, and Antisthenes also taught that the Divine Being is transcendent and incomprehensible but insists such awareness is native to all humans, educated or not. Anyone, he says, who really thinks about it will realize that God is one, unbegotten, indestructible, eternal, dwelling somewhere in the outermost reaches of the cosmos. Clement concludes his argument with a quote from Euripides that asks what nature can be ascribed to the deity who sees all and yet is never seen.⁵ Citing Antisthenes, he confirms that God is like no one, which is why no one can comprehend him through an image.⁶

In his *Apology*, Tertullian also recounts the legacy of ancient Roman aniconism and proposes that Christians—at least in this regard—are more authentically Roman than the polytheists he scorns.⁷ In his *Treatise against the Nations*, Tertullian adds that the Roman Senate often prohibited worship of certain gods and forbade their altars. Thus, he maintains, anti-image attitudes preexisted Christianity.⁸ In his treatise *On Idolatry*, Tertullian claims not only that aniconic religions preexisted Christianity but

also that Satan introduced effigies of deities, along with their artificers. Prior to that, religion did without them.^{[9](#)}

Roughly a century later, the polemicist Arnobius, like Athenagoras, reiterated the belief that the earliest Romans were aniconic worshipers of the gods. Rather than crediting this directly to King Numa, however, he cited the opinion of Varro (ca. 116-27 BCE), whose lost work *Antiquities of Divine and Human Matters* was a kind of encyclopedia of Roman religious and cultic institutions.^{[10](#)} According to Arnobius, Varro maintained that true gods have no desire for sacrifices and, furthermore, images constructed from ordinary matter care even less for such things. As lifeless and senseless objects, they are oblivious to victims slain in their honor.^{[11](#)}

Varro's work was a primary source for Augustine of Hippo's description of Roman religion. In his treatise *City of God*, Augustine refers to Varro as the most learned authority on the subject. According to Augustine, Varro reported that ancient Romans worshiped their gods for more than 170 years without making any images of them, and if this custom had continued, the gods would have been more purely venerated. Varro added that those who first consecrated images not only increased error but eliminated all fear of the deities and held them in contempt. Yet Augustine notes that Varro used the word *increased* and not *initiated* here because he contended that polytheism was already error ridden even before the images were introduced. For Varro, the true worship would have been of

one governing, immutable, and invisible deity. Augustine comments, however, that Varro somewhat contrarily commended artists' giving the gods certain physical features to aid worshipers' recognition. He adds that Varro optimistically presumed that viewers would also discern a higher truth: that the gods' human forms are a reminder of humans' likeness to them in possessing rational souls. Objecting, Augustine insists that depicting deities with human appearances actually lowers them to the image makers' (and devotees') level and thwarts true worship of a God who is altogether different from them.^{[12](#)}

JEWISH ANICONISM

In discussing Roman religion, Augustine also states that Varro offered the exemplary case of the Jewish nation and would have far preferred that the Romans had remained aniconic like the Jews.^{[13](#)} This exemplary Jewish aniconism, at least as reported by Augustine, raises the question of whether Jews ever entertained the possibility of imaging God, with or without a human form. The belief that Jews were aniconic also appears in the writings of Origen, who claimed that the ancient Hebrews refused to accord image makers the rights of citizenship and expelled any who dared make objects that would attract unmerited devotion. Quoting the biblical injunction against graven likenesses, Origen insists that no painters or sculptors lived among them.^{[14](#)}

This often-cited biblical injunction against graven images does not, however, justify an overly simplistic reading of Hebrew scripture to suggest that it bans all figurative art or even all depictions of God. The context and purpose of the various biblical attacks on idols differed through time and circumstance. Historians widely believe that the prohibition against images outlined in the Ten Commandments may date to no earlier than the religious reforms of King Josiah in the seventh century BCE (see 1 Kgs 23:1-24) and that these reforms evolved throughout and after the Babylonian exile.¹⁵ In other words, sacred images may have come to be regarded as incompatible with religion only during the Persian period, in the second half of the first millennium BCE.¹⁶ Based on this chronology, many biblical scholars have proposed that in the first half of the first millennium BCE, Israelite religious practice may have included certain nonfigurative or symbolic representations of the deity.¹⁷ Some of their arguments raise the commonsense point that prohibitions against cultic images make sense only if some existed, perhaps like those described as being in the Temple itself: the gilded images of cherubim or lions and oxen (1 Kgs 6:23-27, 7:25-29). Others disagree, however, asserting that the Israelite religion was aniconic from the beginning.¹⁸

This raises the question of what the word *aniconism* means or, more specifically, what it encompasses. In a limited sense, the term applies only to the absence of any figurative representations of a deity, whether they are

anthropomorphic or zoomorphic. This does not necessitate an absolute and programmatic lack of pictorial art nor even require the repudiation of mental images or of symbols that refer to the deity but are not regarded as actual divine likenesses. For example, the empty cherubim throne, or mercy seat, in the Jerusalem Temple's Holy of Holies implied the presence of an invisible and unimaginable deity but was not intended to depict it. Other types of sacred objects, like standing stones or altars, are properly described as aniconic, insofar as they are not worked by artisans to display human or animal characteristics.^{[19](#)}

During the time when Christianity was emerging as a distinct religious faith, some Jews appear to have been particularly hostile to figural images of most kinds. The first-century Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria (d. ca. 50 CE) objected to figurative art, but on more philosophical than scriptural grounds. Echoing Plato, Philo judged art imitative and fraudulent, tempting viewers to mistake something sensible and transitory as something transcendent and stable. His treatise *On the Decalogue* argues that polytheists who worship the sun, moon, or stars err less than artists who fabricate gods' representations from wood, stone, or metal.^{[20](#)} These, he says, undermine the foundational conception of the ever-living God and Creator as utterly different from his creation. In attributing life or sense to lifeless and insensate matter, their clients might as well worship the artisans who fashion these products and the artisans might as well worship their own

tools or even hands.^{[21](#)} Yet despite its title, Philo's treatise provides little analysis of or explicit reference to the commandment against making idols (e.g., Exod 20:4).

More-focused Jewish critiques of idols concentrated on images associated with the cults of occupying Gentiles and occasionally cited those types of images that are mentioned in the Hebrew scriptures. Many such citations are found in the works of Philo's younger contemporary the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus (b. 37 CE). For example, Josephus criticized King Solomon as impious for permitting those images of oxen and lions in his temple.^{[22](#)} Reporting on his own time, Josephus explicitly condemned King Herod the Great for erecting a Roman eagle over the Temple gate, and recorded the martyrdom of forty Jews who dared to remove it.^{[23](#)} Elsewhere, Josephus narrates instances of Jews willing to die to prevent a Roman imposition of eagle standards, images of gods, or statues of emperors in the city of Jerusalem.^{[24](#)}

A particularly famous episode of Jewish resistance to pagan cult images evidently took place during the reign of the emperor Gaius Caligula, who ordered his general Petronius to install in the Jerusalem Temple an image of Caligula as Zeus (ca. 40 CE). As both Josephus and Philo recount, Petronius tried to find a way to avoid disaster after a delegation of Jews pleaded with him, swearing that they would commit mass suicide rather than allow the Temple's desecration.^{[25](#)} According to Philo, Judea's King Agrippa, whom Caligula regarded as a friend, wrote an appeal to the

emperor. In this letter he insisted that the Temple, as the dwelling place of the Highest God, had never housed an image made by human hands. Furthermore, he added, the Jewish race had resolutely disallowed any visual depictions of the invisible deity.²⁶ Although the authenticity of this reported letter has been questioned, it and Josephus's version of the story are often given as evidence that Jews not only lacked visual depictions of their deity but also were generally intolerant of figurative images. According to Josephus, the God of Israel absolutely outlawed making images of any living creature and especially any divine images.²⁷

Despite these chronicled incidents, concluding that first-century CE Jews were absolutely and universally antagonistic to images—or even strictly aniconic regarding images of the divine—fails to acknowledge that writings like those of Josephus might not reflect the customs or beliefs of all the Jewish people even in his own time. Generalizing from Josephus's writings has resulted in a demonstrably mistaken idea that Jews produced no pictorial art prior to the third century CE. It has also led to a reductive assumption that Jews' aniconism was a hallmark of their resistance to Christianity and to Greco-Roman polytheism.²⁸ Though some scholars have argued that Josephus's narratives reflect a developing conservatism about figurative art, others have suggested that he intended to characterize Jewish anti-Roman sentiment only in terms of religious scruples rather than

political ones.^{[29](#)} Simply put, Josephus perhaps wanted to frame Jewish resistance as less threatening and thereby gain his audience's sympathetic reception, like any good apologist.^{[30](#)}

Nevertheless, according to certain ancient Roman authors, at least Herod's Second Temple was devoid of pictorial art that included depictions of human figures or faces. This may have extended to spaces beyond the Temple, if one accepts the testimony of such writers as Livy, Tacitus, Strabo, and Cassius Dio. In his *Geography*, written in the late first century BCE or the first decade of the first century CE, Strabo characterizes Jews as having banned all image carving and as worshiping an imageless god.^{[31](#)} Two centuries or so later, Cassius Dio (ca. 155–235) described Jews as not only refusing to honor the traditional gods but showing extreme reverence for a single divinity of whom they had no statue and whom they regarded as invisible and unnamable.^{[32](#)} For his part, Livy, writing sometime between 27 and 9 BCE, just stated that Jews neither identified the deity whose Temple stood in Jerusalem nor had any image of their god anywhere.^{[33](#)}

Tacitus (ca. 100 CE) similarly maintained that Jews prohibited representations of deities in human form in their city and their Temple. He explained that they judged such things to be profane and even forbade their kings and Roman emperors to be honored with portrait statues.^{[34](#)} According to Tacitus, when the Roman general Pompey entered the Temple, he found an empty, secret shrine

devoid of any cult images.³⁵ Further on in his *History*, Tacitus claims that when Titus stormed the city of Jerusalem a century later, he seized from the Temple only its menorah and other vessels, as he could find no image of the Israelite God to display among the spoils for his victory parade. Apparently, Tacitus was confused about this dearth of divine images, for he asserts that when Titus arrived, the Temple was illumined with fire from the sky, the doors of the holy shrine opened, and a supernatural voice cried, "The gods are leaving!" followed by a rushing noise to confirm their departure.³⁶

The testimony of these ancient textual sources and the lack of portrait statues in the archaeological remains still do not justify a conclusion that ancient Jews were hostile to pictorial art broadly or sacred iconography specifically. Surviving evidence, while relatively scarce, includes objects decorated with birds, other animals, and winged angelic figures. For example, a third-century BCE sarcophagus at Beth She'arim depict two lions attacking the head of a bull (see fig. 2.1).³⁷ Moreover, although most second- and first-century decoration by Jews is mainly nonfigurative (e.g., geometric or vegetal patterns), they appear to have felt less constrained in following centuries. They might also have been inclined to avoid figuration in Jerusalem than elsewhere in the world, where they were likely to be embedded in a mixed religious culture. Other instances of Jewish pictorial art include the frescoes of the third-century CE Dura Europos Synagogue and the fourth-

to-seventh-century Galilean synagogue mosaic pavements, with their depictions of humans, sea creatures, birds, zodiac figures, other animals, and even Helios—iconography that many Jews of an earlier period might have regarded as illicit.^{[38](#)}



FIGURE 2.1 Sarcophagus from Beth She'arim, Israel, third century BCE. (Photo: Hanan Isacher / Alamy Stock Photo.)

Some Jewish authorities even appear to have permitted figurative art. The Jerusalem Talmud reports that Rabbi Yohanan allowed two-dimensional figures to be painted on walls and that Rabbi Abun permitted images in mosaic pavements so long as they did not draw worship or veneration to themselves.^{[39](#)} In any case, no single reason

easily explains this apparent alteration in Jewish attitudes toward certain kinds of visual art. The differences among Jewish sects and the influence of local cultures in the late antique Mediterranean world were equally important.⁴⁰ Yet although Jews seem to have tolerated and even employed figurative art at various times and places, their objection to divine representations apparently held firm, along with their hostility to cult images of foreign deities. Jews' stance toward pictorial images might be best characterized, in the words of one scholar, as anti-idolic rather than aniconic. It would be even less correct to describe it as iconophobic.⁴¹ That is, Jews were not against pictorial art as such but, like early Christian apologists, primarily opposed to the images that represented foreign or false gods and, in certain instances, figurative symbols of occupying forces (e.g., the Roman eagle).

THE PROBLEM OF ANTHROPOMORPHISM

The most compelling reason for the absence of visual depictions of the God of Israel is that this deity was believed to be, by nature, invisible and therefore inexpressible. Faithful Jews (and later Christians) refused to make a divine image because no such thing was possible. Yet asserting the Divine Being's invisibility challenged biblical passages that attribute certain physical features of human beings to God. While the relatively modern term *anthropomorphism* was not widely used in antiquity, certain

Greek and Latin authors maintained that the oldest divine images had no human features and that some were even nonfigurative. For instance, Pausanias asserted that the archaic Thespians venerated an image of Eros in the form of an unwrought stone and that this represented an early (if not the earliest) form of Greek religious iconography.^{[42](#)} Both textual and physical evidence confirm the preexistence of aniconic images (*xoana*), although scholars debate whether these preceded figural representations (both anthropomorphic and zoomorphic) or if aniconic and figural types existed simultaneously and were not necessarily viewed as categorically different.^{[43](#)}

These aniconic images might include the heavenly bodies as well as such physical artifacts as uncarved stones or unworked pieces of wood. Apparently, these nonfigurative cult objects challenged some devotees' sensibilities. After posing the question, in his sermon on Psalm 113, of why one would turn away from the sun to venerate a fabricated depiction of the sun, Augustine concludes that people evidently prefer to worship gods who look like themselves—they respond more to bodies that resemble their own. He adds that because people are accustomed to seeing living creatures with arms and legs (and to feeling such limbs moving as part of their own bodies), they are easily duped into attributing animation to statues with human forms. They find it hard to believe that something resembling a human does not possess life.^{[44](#)} Thus, anthropomorphic depictions of gods allow more accessible, personal, and

even intimate connection between humans and their objects of worship than aniconic ones do.

Philosophical critiques of anthropomorphism and explanations like Augustine's of its basis would have been well known to Christian thinkers. The first book of Cicero's treatise *On the Nature of the Gods* narrates a dialogue between the Stoic Lucilius Balbus and the Epicurean Gaius Velleius that supposedly took place at the home of the pontifex maximus (Roman high priest) Aurelius Cotta. Here Balbus attacks Epicurean ideas about immortals, including that deities have human form. Nevertheless, while he allows that anthropomorphism is fundamentally mistaken, he admits that people are unable to imagine immortals without giving them a human physique and facial features. Balbus's interlocutor—in this instance, Cotta—responds that although the gods possess no outward appearance or shape, artisans make them in human likeness, the most beautiful form of all, because that is how they appear to people in visions and dreams.^{[45](#)}

Expanding on Cotta's explanation for why the gods should be depicted with exceptionally handsome human features, the Greek rhetorician Dio Chrysostom (40–115) argued that showing them with human forms signified the deities' rational natures. He considered the conceptions of gods that arise in artists' minds to be far superior to the work of their hands and maintained that although some of these conceptions derive from the works of poets, many are innate. As mentally prompted ideas, they reveal how

humans share in the divine nature. Dio Chrysostom put one of his speeches in the mouth of Pheidias, the sculptor of the great Olympian Zeus, having him explain that this artwork's appearance was partly based on the works of Homer but also that depicting the god in a human form was a visual means of showing Zeus's rationality:

For mind and intelligence in and of themselves no statuary or painter will ever be able to represent; for they are utterly incapable of observing such attributes with their eyes or of learning of them by inquiry. But as for that in which this intelligence manifests itself, humankind, having no mere inkling thereof but actual knowledge, fly to it for refuge, attributing to God a human body as a vessel to contain intelligence and rationality, in their lack of a better illustration, and in their perplexity seeking to indicate that which is invisible and unportrayable by means of something portrayable and visible.^{[46](#)}

Dio Chrysostom's explanation attests to an inherent human yearning to make the spiritual accessible through the medium of material, to represent something invisible, distant, strange, and unportrayable by means of something visible, accessible, familiar, and depictable.

Similarly, Maximus of Tyre argued that statues of gods are beneficial insofar as they allow devotees to venerate the deities through an accessible medium. Although earlier generations did not resort to idols, less sophisticated worshipers cannot conceive a god without a form and find images to be helpful aids. Maximus thus defended cult images, if only because they are how artists, much like poets, attempt to give idealized and perceptible forms to incomprehensible beings. Maximus especially validated

anthropomorphic images of gods, not only because they nurture devotees' pious regard for the transcendent and invisible realities to which they point but also because he judged a beautiful human form (fine visaged and well proportioned) to be most like those of the deities. Thus, it would be dishonorable to depict them in any other way.^{[47](#)}

Christian apologists were also well aware of critiques of conceiving of the gods in human form by the more ancient, pre-Socratic philosophers. Clement of Alexandria reported Xenophanes's famous assertion that if cattle, horses, and lions could depict their deities they would make them in shapes that also looked like themselves.^{[48](#)} Yet another of Xenophanes's ideas, cited in the work of Clement's approximate contemporary the Greek philosopher Sextus Empiricus, maintains that the deity is unlike mortals insofar as God's whole being sees, hears, and comprehends. This seems to suggest that this ancient thinker was known to regard God as in some sense corporeal, although without human form or likeness.^{[49](#)} Irenaeus of Lyon echoed this when he portrayed God as being all thought, all will, all mind, all eye, and all ear. In his *Stromata*, Clement of Alexandria similarly describes God as all ear and all eye.^{[50](#)} Earlier in that same treatise, Clement elaborates on the ways that artists' depictions of the gods as beautiful are deceitfully seductive. Their loveliness can cast spells over viewers, even some who know better, and conquer their ability to reason. Then, quoting the apostle Paul, he admonishes his readers to

avoid the vanity of changing God's glory into the likeness of a frail human being and thereby worshiping the creature rather than the Creator.^{[51](#)}

Other Christian writers, however, asserted that, as divine beings, the gods should be depicted as exceptionally beautiful. For example, Minucius Felix's protagonist Octavius goads his pagan friend to admit that Vulcan's lameness and Juno's cowlike eyes are comical. He contends that no one can respect gods whose images show them as ugly, ungainly, or ignominious.^{[52](#)}

This raises an additional issue with anthropomorphism. Presumably, the gods' images ought to possess consistent physical attributes to be recognizable, but on what are their depictions based? As noted above, according to Dio Chrysostom, artists modeled their works on those of poets, but this could be problematic if artists, intending only to honor the gods by incorporating their own ideas, made their physical appearances more appealing to viewers. To the extent that these images deviate from the myths on which they are based, they become rivals to the poets' works and cause confusion.^{[53](#)} What is the right or true likeness of any particular god?

Christian critics also argued that artistic originality and inconsistencies undermined the credibility of these portrayals. Minucius Felix's Octavius prods his pagan companion to admit that statues of Jupiter sometimes have a beard and sometimes are clean shaven.^{[54](#)} Arnobius likewise pointed out discrepancies in portraits of the gods,

noting variations in facial hair, body type, and eye color. How is it possible, he asked, to fashion a likeness of a model that no one has seen in life? Even observable heavenly bodies worshiped as gods, like the sun and the moon, are given human faces or forms, although everyone can observe that they are actually round disks of pure light.^{[55](#)}

EUHEMERISM: THE GODS WHO WERE ONCE MERE MORTALS

The problem of anthropomorphism is complicated by the arguments of Minucius Felix, Tertullian, and other early Christian writers who held that the pagan gods were merely dead humans.^{[56](#)} The assertion that these gods were false was therefore based not solely on their alleged nonexistence but also on their actual existence, as mere mortals. In the early to mid-second century CE, Aristides of Athens argued that those who believe heroes or great men of the past can be transformed into deities are terribly mistaken, because true gods cannot be born or die, having neither beginning nor end.^{[57](#)} Minucius Felix more specifically cited the late fourth-century BCE rationalist Euhemerus of Messene, whose writings claim that the immortals Uranus, Cronus, and Zeus were rulers or heroes deified and gradually mythologized by their grateful people for their acts of benevolence or philanthropic works.^{[58](#)}

Such ideas attributed to Euhemerus were potent weapons that Christians could use to attack both pagan

deities and their images. These ideas bear a striking similarity to lines from the deuterocanonical Wisdom of Solomon, a first-century BCE text that characterizes idols as the vainglory of dead men who became honored as gods (Wis 14:15–17). While this may have influenced Christian thinkers, similar notions appear in the works of pre-Socratic writers like Xenophanes and Herodotus, as well as in writings of Cicero, who refers to Euhemerus when he suggests that the immortals are brave, famous, or powerful men who were transformed into deities and worshiped and prayed to after their deaths.^{[59](#)}

A document often attributed to Cyprian of Carthage sums up the argument in its opening verses, saying that the traditional gods were formerly beloved kings who began to be venerated after death. Once temples were dedicated to them and their portraits sculpted, festivals initially intended only to honor them were transformed into sacred ceremonies offered to deities. Thus, rituals of consolation were made into religious rites.^{[60](#)} According to Origen, Celsus allowed that Christians did not venerate deified heroes like Herakles, Asclepius, or Dionysus because they were once humans, but he objected that they were more than willing to worship someone who was born and died as a mortal.^{[61](#)} The comparison could be apt, except that Origen interjects that Cretans worship Zeus at his tomb, while Christians know that Christ's tomb is empty because he rose from the dead.

Other Christian writers offered a Euhemeristic argument—that the pagan gods were neither originally immortal nor truly divine but merely apotheosized humans—as a way to claim the inferiority of these deities to the eternal Christian God. Arnobius, for example, maintained that poets gave the former their names, characters, and exploits and that their images had relatively recent origins, none of them from more than four hundred years earlier (when, he says, the Greeks began to make visual art). Yet, like Origen, Arnobius was obliged to answer pagan critics who argued that Jesus was also born as a man, acknowledging that truth and simultaneously undermining their point. He allowed that Christians worship someone who was born as a human being but added that it was unfair for this very reason for pagans to criticize him, as their own practice was to elevate ordinary mortals to the level of the gods. Yet, he continued, Jesus is the exception to the futility of venerating merely mortal (and long dead) heroes because Jesus makes the true God known and leads his followers from false worship of inanimate statues to the superior blessings of the true One. Arnobius had to allow that Jesus was a human being, but even while he was human he was also deemed a god and properly honored with divine worship.[62](#)

THE CHRISTIAN GOD'S INCORPOREALITY

Despite apologists' mockery of artists' giving deities human forms, biblical depictions of the Jewish and Christian God

with hands, lap, eyes, or ears made it difficult for Christians to insist that God is absolutely incorporeal, although some would distinguish between a corporeal and a spiritual body.^{[63](#)} Materialist that he was, Tertullian, in his treatise *Against Praxeas*, claims that God has a unique kind of spiritual body. In this, he reflects the influence of Stoicism, which asserts the materiality of all reality. Tertullian maintains that God must be a substance to be the creator of substances, since from an empty void nothing can come forth.^{[64](#)} His position on God's corporeality has implications for his insistence on the bodily resurrection of the Savior and the eventual resurrection of the bodies of the Christian faithful. Nothing, he says, is incorporeal except something that does not exist.^{[65](#)}

Tertullian's views were not shared by everyone. Justin Martyr opens his dialogue with the Jew Trypho by recounting the teachings that converted him to Christianity, among them that the deity cannot be seen by bodily eyes but only discerned in the mind alone, having no shape, dimension, or color and being beyond all essence and utterly inexplicable. His interlocutor then asks how philosophers can make accurate judgments about God, without any sensory knowledge or instruction, and Justin replies that the mind must be purified before it can conceive of a Being who is the cause of all thought but never perceived by bodily eyes.^{[66](#)} Later in this work, Trypho characterizes Jews (and not Christians) as naïvely believing that the unbegotten God has fingers, hands, and

feet and so could appear in a human form to Abraham and to Jacob.^{[67](#)}

Origen of Alexandria maintained that intelligible perceptions are immaterial and, in that respect, entirely superior to sensible things. For this reason, he insisted that the Supreme Deity cannot be bodily in any material sense and, contrary to Tertullian, believed in a human spiritual, rather than bodily, resurrection.^{[68](#)} He explicitly refuted Celsus's accusations that Christians believe in a corporeal God, explaining that Celsus failed to understand that Christians never interpret the scriptural text that says humans bear the image of God (Gen 1:27) to mean that human bodies resemble God's. Rather, Origen argued, the way that humans are in God's image is in their inward souls, which can be renewed and perfected. God, he insisted, has no characteristics that human beings can comprehend.

Yet Celsus seems to have been aware that certain Christians regarded God as corporeal and even, more specifically, anthropomorphic. In this respect, some Christians might not have been so different from many of their polytheistic neighbors. And as Celsus pointed out, the Bible describes God as having hands to work creation and a mouth to speak with. This prompted Origen to explain that such images are meant to be taken spiritually and not literally and that the Bible clearly states that God is incorporeal; he added that when scripture says God is invisible, it also means that God is incorporeal: "If he

[Celsus] means limbs, we agree with him, assuming that the characteristics of which we know are only physical and those known by ordinary sense-perception. . . . But if anyone were to understand in a more transcendent sense the words *of which we know*, since all that we know is inferior to God as He really is, it is not wrong that we also should accept the view that God has no characteristics of which we know.”⁶⁹ For Origen, God’s creation of humanity in his own image is not a justification for anthropomorphism—it is a repudiation of it.⁷⁰ Further along in his work, Origen cites biblical texts affirming that that no one has ever seen God (John 1:18) and that the First Born of all creation is called the image of the invisible God (Col 1:15) as evidence that the Christian God is incorporeal.⁷¹

The problem continued even into the fifth century, when Augustine tried to reconcile Old Testament accounts of Jacob’s, Moses’s, and Isaiah’s visions or encounters with God with his belief that God is incorporeal. Referring to the teaching of his mentor Ambrose, he emphasized that sensible things and God are perceived with different faculties. Moreover, God may will to be seen or not to be seen sensibly, whereas humans cannot choose to become invisible. Thus, the deity’s appearance in humanlike form as reported in the Bible was never God’s full reality. God can appear as he wills and in what form he wills, while remaining truly invisible and unchangeable.⁷² In other writings, Augustine again addresses the issue of scriptural

references to God's human attributes (e.g., lap, arms, bosom, hands). While he claims that God is essentially invisible and that those who cannot grasp this are likely to fall into idolatry, he also allows that some of the theophanies to the patriarchs were intimations of the divine, even if neither full nor complete visions of God.⁷³

In a letter to a certain layman, Consentius, who had apparent difficulty thinking of God as a disembodied being, Augustine admits that it is troublesome for humans to conceive of a being without a body but urges his correspondent to purge and deny any fantasies or other ideas that imagine God with the likeness of a human. He explains that invisible things are seen only when they are comprehended by reason—a means appropriate to them—and, as such, are more lasting than the fleeting visions of things seen by bodily eyes or concocted by weak or flawed human thinking.⁷⁴

Thus, trying to resolve scriptural ambiguity about whether God was, is, or, in the future will be in some sense visible does not address the question of whether it is necessary or even possible to completely eradicate all pictures of the deity from the human imagination. In his *Confessions*, Augustine expresses his frustration with trying to purge all images of God from his mind and describes his feelings of shame at being unable to grasp an idea of a formless God, since he struggled to understand how something could exist without shape or mass:

From the time that I began to learn something of your wisdom, I did not

conceive of you, God, in the shape of the human body. I always shunned this, and was glad when I found the same concept in the faith of our spiritual mother, your Catholic Church. But how otherwise to conceive of you I could not see. I a mere man, and a man with profound defects, was trying to think of you the supreme, sole and true God. With all my heart I believed you to be incorruptible, immune from injury, and unchangeable. . . . My heart vehemently protested against all the physical images in my mind, and by this single blow I attempted to expel from my mind's eye the swarm of unpurified notions flying about there. Hardly had they been dispersed when in the flash of an eye they had regrouped and were back again. They attacked my power of vision and clouded it. Although you were not in the shape of the human body, I nevertheless felt forced to imagine something physical occupying space diffused either in the world or even through infinite space outside the world.⁷⁵

THE ANTHROPOMORPHITE CONTROVERSY

As Augustine acknowledged, humans are prone to imagine God in human form and erasing such images from the mind is difficult, even if they could be eradicated from the external world. At the end of the fourth century, this problem of making mental images of God erupted into a full-blown theological controversy. In the late 390s, Bishop Theophilus of Alexandria wrote a letter that, among other matters (including setting the date of Easter), denounced a group of Egyptian monks who were apparently promoting the idea that God has a bodily, human form.

The circumstances of this well-known dispute are told by various ancient sources, including one of the monk John Cassian's *Conferences* on prayer.⁷⁶ As he explains there, he felt compelled to insert the account of the controversy into his discussion because he believed it important to

clarify the correct way to understand the teaching in the book of Genesis about the image of God. Although Cassian does not report the content of Theophilus's letter, he characterizes it as effectively refuting what Cassian regards as the foolish heresy of the anthropomorphites, monks who evidently believed, on the basis of Genesis 1:26-27, that God has a human body like theirs.

In Cassian's account, Theophilus's letter was received badly by nearly all the monks in Egypt, and his denial that God should be conceived of in a human form caused so much distress that many of them denounced the bishop as a heretic who impugned scriptural teaching. According to the fifth-century historian Socrates, a throng of simple Egyptian ascetics then left their monasteries, rushed to Alexandria, incited a riot against the bishop, and threatened to kill him. Theophilus, attempting to pacify the outraged monks, offered a strategically conciliatory comment, that in them he saw the face of God.^{[77](#)}

A number of other contemporary works offer accounts of this controversy, including writings by Palladius of Helenopolis, Sozomen, Theodoret, and Sulpicius Severus, as well as the Coptic *Life of Aphou*.^{[78](#)} With the exception of the last one, these mostly take a pro-Origenist position in the debates surrounding the teachings (or received traditions) of that earlier Alexandrian theologian. As noted above, Origen strongly opposed any notion that God has a human physique or corporeal body. One of the other characters in this story is the Egyptian ascetic and

systematizer of Origen's thought Evagrius Ponticus, who was strongly anti-anthropomorphite. Evagrius also practiced a form of monastic spirituality that endeavored to mentally erase any images of God during contemplative prayer. In his *Chapters on Prayer*, Evagrius instructs, "When you are praying do not fancy the Divinity like some image formed in yourself. Avoid also allowing your spirit to be impressed with the seal of some particular shape, but rather, free from all matter, draw near the immaterial Being and you will attain to understanding."⁷⁹

Although he died shortly before Theophilus's fateful letter was sent to the Egyptian monastic communities, Evagrius's writings almost certainly influenced that bishop's original disparagement of the anthropomorphite position. Like Augustine, Evagrius maintained that humans are invariably disposed to produce images of God and can overcome this tendency only through arduous efforts to expel them from the mind.⁸⁰

The Origenist controversies of the era added a layer of theological complexity to these disputes, especially as the pro-Origenist monks known as the Four Tall Brothers and John Chrysostom joined the cast of characters, acting first as Theophilus's allies and then as his bitter adversaries after his seeming change of mind.⁸¹ Although Theophilus appears to have initially affirmed Origen's teaching that God is incorporeal, his encounter with rioting monks evidently moved him to an almost diametrically opposite position.⁸²

The anthropomorphite monks were not unsophisticated simpletons. They found it hard to pray to an utterly imageless deity, but they probably did not attribute a human appearance to God. Rather, they believed that the divine image remained within humans, even after the Fall, although imperfect and waiting for future restoration. For them, this would have been a matter of faith, not of literally interpreting biblical references to God's face, hands, feet, and so forth. They relied on scriptures, like 1 Corinthians 11:7, that confirmed (to them) that the image had never been fully lost. Moreover, their belief that humans retained some likeness to God, even in their postlapsarian state, was not unlike Origen's teaching, and these monks too depended on the potential for recovery of that likeness, so that their ascetic discipline might lead them toward personal perfection and unity of mind, soul, and body.[83](#)

In his report, John Cassian relates the touching story of a monk named Sarapion, who had a reputation for steadfast austerity and self-discipline. Although he possessed these acknowledged virtues and was dedicated to living a holy life, he was evidently theologically untrained, and so an assertion that God was incorporeal was simply unfathomable to him. He regarded it as a contradiction of the places where scriptures refer to God's eyes, ears, feet, and hands and dismissed it as an invention of elite intellectuals. The old monk finally acquiesced when a deacon named Photinus explained that the biblical account of creation in the image and likeness of God should be

interpreted in a spiritual and not literal sense. According to Cassian, Sarapion's community rejoiced at his assent to orthodox teaching, having feared that he would be condemned as a heretic. When they gathered to pray and give thanks for the rescue of this good brother's soul, he suddenly became confused and terribly upset, for he sensed that the way he imagined God as he prayed had departed from his heart. Giving way to bitter sorrow and copious tears, Sarapion threw himself on the ground and howled, "Ah, the misfortune! They've taken my God away from me. I have no one to hold on to, and I don't know whom to adore or to address."⁸⁴

However, for Origen, Evagrius, and Theophilus, efficacious contemplation or proper prayer must be imageless. Thus, they regarded even mental visualizations of God to be worthless as aids to prayer and even blasphemous. They interpreted scriptural references to God's physical appearance as metaphors, not to be taken literally, and understood that people were created in God's image in a purely spiritual sense, not as any proof that God has corporeal or otherwise humanlike features.

ANICONIC DEPICTIONS OF THE DIVINE BEING

As discussed above, prohibitions of idols as found in the Hebrew scriptures and the Christian New Testament were mainly aimed at images of foreign (false) gods. Biblical texts that declare the invisibility of the Divine Being do not take up the problem of pictorial depictions of God,

presumably because to make such images is impossible by definition. Other biblical texts that refer to God's physical appearance to certain persons might be interpreted as acknowledging that, while God has an image, it is improper or blasphemous to attempt to depict or even imagine it. The problem of imagined or mental images of God is secondary, insofar as they are specific to an individual and not publicly displayed and venerated. Simple minds might resist being purged of all mistaken notions of God's appearance, but the fact that these are ephemeral and personal renders them relatively harmless to others. Material artifacts are different, especially if they are widely exhibited to impressionable viewers.^{[85](#)}

Theologians' insistence on the absolute invisibility, incorporeality, and ineffability of God or the danger of seeing God even in some form that God condescends to adopt should have constrained artists from attempting to produce any pictorial renderings of the Divine Being. Artists, however, do not appear to have been inhibited by either biblical prohibitions or theological discussions that would render their efforts heretical or dangerously blasphemous. They might have understood their task to be similar to that of the biblical writers. If sacred scripture could describe God with human features, even if understood metaphorically, why couldn't artists also do so, albeit in visual rather than verbal images? Artists might justify their products as figures and not to be taken any more literally than written descriptions of God's hands,

face, or feet. However, graphic depictions are often perceived as more idolatrous than verbal expressions, perhaps because their materiality renders them somehow more potent or more real. Visual images produce impressions on the memory that are difficult to eradicate. They can have a powerful effect upon the emotions and serve as proof in a way that words cannot (as in “seeing is believing”). Yet words can also be powerful and effective at forming images in the mind, as is evident in the Bible’s many descriptions of the deity with human characteristics.

Despite the inhibiting efforts of theologians, some early Jewish and Christian visual artists undoubtedly experimented with strategies that implied the invisibility of God. In early Jewish iconography, as found in the Dura Europos Synagogue in eastern Syria, dated to the mid-third century CE, or the mosaic pavements of late antique synagogues in the Galilee, the Ark or perhaps the Torah shrine and scrolls served as aniconic symbols for the Divine. For example, the scene in the Dura Europos Synagogue that shows the Ark destroying the Philistine idol Dagon (1 Sam 5:1-5) recounts the power of this object as an instrument of God’s power and a sign of God’s presence. The surrounding images on the walls and mosaic pavements of many of these synagogues included biblical characters and scenes, personified seasons, personified signs of the zodiac, and even Helios riding in his chariot, confounding and contradicting long-standing beliefs that Jews made no figurative art. Despite these surprising

discoveries, however, none of these artworks depict the God of Israel in explicitly anthropomorphic form. Thus, they seem to affirm God's incorporeality, if not precisely God's invisibility. Nevertheless, depictions of a disembodied hand regularly appear in illustrations of those biblical narratives in which characters encounter God or hear God's voice (voices being difficult to render visually).

Representing the deity as a disembodied hand—the *manus Dei*—seems to have occurred first in Jewish rather than Christian art. Surviving evidence includes the wall paintings of the Dura Europos Synagogue. The image of the divine hand acts as an indication of God's presence in lieu of a fully anthropomorphized figure. In this sense it parallels the tetragrammaton in the Hebrew scriptures as a way of evoking, but not saying, the name of God. The divine hand shows up in renderings of passages in which God's voice is heard, as in pictorial depictions of the binding of Isaac, where it emerges from a cloudlike shape. The figure of an outstretched right hand as a symbolic allusion to speech makes some sense as a reference to the familiar orator's gesture (*adlocutio*) in ancient visual art.^{[86](#)} Yet the hand does not always refer to instances of God speaking, as in the Ezekiel panels along the north synagogue wall. On the left, it lifts Ezekiel by his hair to illustrate the text "I looked, and there was a figure that looked like a human being; below what appeared to be its loins it was fire, and above the loins it was like the appearance of brightness, like gleaming amber. It stretched out the form of a hand

and took me by a lock of my head; and the spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven” (Ezek 8:2-4; see fig. 2.2). The next set of images depict the *manus Dei* several more times, as it commands Ezekiel to prophesy first to the dry bones and then to the enlivened bodies (Ezek 37:1-6). The *manus Dei* shows up elsewhere in Jewish iconography, including in the sixth-century CE mosaic pavement in the Galilean synagogue at Beth Alpha, where it commands Abraham to stop the sacrifice of Isaac. In this instance, God’s words (לֹא־תִשְׁלַח , *al-tishlah*, “do not lay [your hand]”) are printed underneath it (see fig. 2.3).



FIGURE 2.2 Ezekiel panels, Dura Europos Synagogue, ca. 240 CE, now in the National Museum, Damascus. (Photo: SEF / Art Resource, NY.)



FIGURE 2.3 The binding of Isaac, from the synagogue of Beth Alpha, sixth century CE. (Photo: BibleLandPictures / Alamy Stock Photo.)

Fourth-century Christian art also uses aniconic representations of God in depictions of Abraham's offering of Isaac (see figs. 3.2 and 4.3), as well as of God giving the Law to Moses on Sinai. In one of these instances God's speech is clearly intended, but in the other—the giving of the Law—this is not as apparent. In fact, iconography commonly shows God's right and left hands in combined images of these two scenes. Yet the earliest surviving depictions of Jesus's baptism by John, where one would

expect the *manus Dei* to represent God's words "This is my son, the Beloved, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt 3:17; see also Mark 1:11 and Luke 3:21), lack the hand. This had changed by the sixth century, when the hand showed up in iconography of the baptism (see fig. 2.4). It also appears in a fifth-century image of Christ's ascension, which depicts God's hand reaching down to grasp Christ's as he climbs upward (see fig. 2.5).





FIGURE 2.4 John the Baptist baptizing Jesus, sixth-century ivory plaque from Syria or Egypt, now in the British Museum. (Photo © The Trustees of the British Museum / Art Resource, NY.)



FIGURE 2.5 Ascension of Christ, ivory, ca. 400. (Munich, Bayerisches National-museum, Inv. MA 157. Photo: INTERFOTO

/ Alamy Stock Photo.)

The *manus Dei* continued to be a popular motif into the sixth century, as in the apse mosaic of the Basilica of Sant'Apollinare in Classe in Ravenna. Here it belongs to an unusual transfiguration composition that depicts the three apostles Peter, James, and John as sheep, witnessing the image of Christ as a bust portrait superimposed on a jeweled cross set against a starry night sky. God's right hand reaches down toward the cross-in-orb out of a cloud-streaked and gilded heaven (see fig. 2.6). Some art historians have based reconstructions of Paulinus of Nola's apse iconography (see below) on this mosaic.^{[87](#)}



FIGURE 2.6 Apse mosaic from Sant'Apollinare in Classe, Ravenna, ca. 540. (Photo by the author.)

In addition to representing God's voice or hand, the *manus Dei* could take the place of other bodily features (e.g., an all-seeing eye) and might be intended primarily to indicate God's active involvement with a storied character. The hand holds out a crown to martyrs and saints in a sixth-century basilica (see fig. 5.6), for instance, and to newly baptized Christians in the dome mosaic of the fifth-century baptistery in Naples (see fig. 2.7). This apparently simple solution allowed artists to depict God's presence while affirming God's remoteness or crucial difference from a fully rendered human bodily form. In this sense the Divine Being is imaged symbolically and not literally.[88](#)



FIGURE 2.7 Baptistery dome mosaic, San Giovanni in Fonte, Naples, late fourth or early fifth century. (Photo by the author.)

The jeweled cross in the sixth-century mosaic of Sant'Apollinare in Classe may be considered a separate kind of aniconic figure. Earlier, when the empty cross (without a corpus) appeared in Christian art, it was not precisely a visual reference to God yet seems to have functioned in some instances as a symbol worthy of veneration. Although only rare Christian cross symbols survive among the physical artifacts dated to the first three centuries CE, writings of several early Christian apologists

suggest that Christians may have perceived a cross figure—or perhaps the cross shape within an anchor, a mason’s tool, or a ship’s mast—as a substitute for an image of Christ in human form. Extant early Christian epitaphs from Rome display many examples of possible cross shapes. Minucius Felix’s protagonist Octavius explicitly denies that Christians worshiped crosses, which suggests that outsiders must have concluded that they did. Octavius goes on to explain that the shape of the cross appears everywhere—on a ship at sail, in the yoke of a plough, in military trophies, and even in the posture of prayer—and is thus revealed as part of the natural world.^{[89](#)}

Other early Christian apologists made similar assertions about the ubiquity of the cross sign.^{[90](#)} Tertullian in particular observed that pagan artisans enclosed a structure shaped like a cross in clay to form the images of their gods, and ironically noted that when people venerated those images, they also worshiped crosses in some respect and so were his coreligionists.^{[91](#)}

Evidently, artists tried at least occasionally to use these kinds of figures to avoid anthropomorphic representations of the Trinity. A mosaic in the fifth-century baptistery of Albenga in Liguria, Italy, displays one solution: a Christogram superimposed in triplicate.^{[92](#)} Another solution, on a fifth- or early sixth-century silver paten found near the village of Canoscio in Umbria and now in the Cathedral Museum of Città di Castello, is a gemmed cross flanked by the divine hand and the Holy Spirit dove to the

upper left and right, respectively, and by two confronted lambs below, perhaps representing the Virgin Mary and the Beloved Disciple (see fig. 2.8). An alpha and an omega hang from the crossbar. A similar configuration of figures appears on the lid of a seventh-century silver reliquary now held in the Vatican Library. Here two angels venerate a gemmed cross. Above are the hand of God on the left and the dove of the Holy Spirit on the right.



FIGURE 2.8 Silver paten with gemmed cross, hand of God, and Holy Spirit dove, from the Treasure of Canoscio, Museo del Duomo of Città di Castello, Umbria, Italy. (Photo: Scala / Art Resource, NY.)

These compositions correspond in many aspects to Paulinus of Nola's description of the vault mosaics he commissioned in the fifth century, one for the apse of the cathedral of Saint Felix in Cimitile and the other for a basilica at Fundi (on his ancestral estate). Wishing to depict the Holy Trinity but apparently cautious about erroneously or idolatrously picturing the deity in human form, Paulinus decided to use symbolic figures. In a letter to his friend Sulpicius Severus, he describes what he envisioned for his cathedral:

The Trinity shines out in all its mystery. Christ is represented by a lamb, the Father's voice thunders forth from the sky, and the Holy Spirit flows down in the form of a dove. A wreath's gleaming circle surrounds the cross, and around this circle the apostles form a ring, represented by a chorus of doves. The holy unity of the Trinity merges in Christ, but the Trinity has its threefold symbolism. The Father's voice and the Spirit show forth God, the cross and the lamb proclaim the holy victim. The purple and the palm point to kingship and to triumph. Christ Himself, the Rock, stands on the rock of the Church, and from this rock four plashing fountains flow, the evangelists, the living streams of Christ.^{[93](#)}

Fundi's apse apparently employed roughly the same symbols to express what Paulinus calls "the holy unity of the Trinity." As at Cimitile, the lamb and the cross represented Christ, and the dove the Holy Spirit. Here, however, he explains that the Father's thundering voice was shown as a disembodied hand, reaching down from a ruddy cloud to crown the lamb.^{[94](#)}

Yet even if the cross was an object of veneration for some Christians, it probably was not intended as an explicitly

aniconic representation (in this case of God), any more than other popular figures that symbolized Christ (the fish) or the Holy Spirit (the dove). Nevertheless, the mid-fourth-century discovery of its relics in Jerusalem ultimately assured the cross's legitimacy as an object of veneration, a factor that gave marked momentum to the symbol's popularity in Christian art and devotion.^{[95](#)} One testimony to early veneration of the cross as both relic and symbol comes from a polemical work of the emperor Julian, *Against the Galileans*, written around 362 or 363, mentioned by Libanius, and preserved only partially, in Cyril of Alexandria's refutation *Against Julian*.^{[96](#)} Among his reported attacks on those who worshiped, according to his characterization, a degenerate Palestinian god invented by ignorant fishermen, the emperor lambasted Christians for refusing to venerate Zeus's protective shield, which flew down from heaven, while being perfectly willing to prostrate themselves before the wood of the cross and draw its image on their foreheads and doors.^{[97](#)}

CONCLUSION

Asserting God's unqualified invisibility means that visual depictions of the deity are either impossible or erroneous. To early Jews and Christians, human-made effigies of the gods were not simply ridiculous: their veneration was conclusively idolatrous if not also dangerous. This was equally true whether the images depicted their own God or

gods belonging to other religions. Moreover, to the extent that these figures were anthropomorphic, they were demonstrably foolish. They were merely products of an artist's imagination, and insofar as they pandered to the human desire for gods who look like themselves, they were irrational. To paraphrase Augustine's logic, why would anyone worship an anthropomorphic representation of the sun instead of worshipping the sun itself?

But people do make mental concepts of divine beings in human form and find it difficult to pray to imageless deities. Furthermore, because the Bible itself is filled with descriptions of God as having human features, such conceptions can seem justified. Aniconic symbols like disks, disembodied hands, and empty crosses are not always adequate substitutes for a recognizable and relatable face and body. And, as the next chapter will show, encounters with God as described in the Jewish and Christian scriptures often were personal, face-to-face experiences. Theophanies were rarely imageless, although they might be nonanthropomorphic, like Moses's encounter with the burning bush (Exod 3:4).

The next chapter will also show that for Christians, the incarnation of the Divine Logos in the person of Jesus Christ was not only a religious game changer but altered the ways that Christians visualized the divine—now with a particular and distinctly personal appearance. Was Jesus just another instance of Euhemeristic elevation of an ordinary mortal to the status of a god? As noted above,

Arnobius's rebuttal of pagan critics who evidently argued this very line reveals the problem of claiming Jesus both as God and as different from other gods, who were merely dead kings or heroes.^{[98](#)} Moreover, Jesus's appearance in his earthly life made it not only possible but perhaps even imperative to depict God in visible human form.

OceanofPDF.com

3

EPIPHANIES

Encountering the Visible God

Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness.

GENESIS 1:26

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him.

GENESIS 17:1

He is the image of the invisible God.

COLOSSIANS 1:15

A number of biblical passages complicate assertions of the Divine Being's imperceptibility and indicate some ambiguity about God's absolute and consistent invisibility. Consequently, they also raise the question of whether divine representations are truly impossible. Significantly, the only Hebrew scripture text that seems to imply God's

invisibility is a passage in Deuteronomy in which Moses reminds the Israelites that they saw no form when the Lord spoke to them at Horeb and heard only a voice speaking from the midst of the fire (Deut 4:12-15). Yet even this passage does not say that God is invisible—only that the Israelites could not see the divine form. Furthermore, Hebrew scripture stories in which individuals encounter God as a physical presence imply that God can be seen as well as heard.

The New Testament contains passages, however, that firmly assert God's essential invisibility and the human inability to see God. The prologue to the fourth gospel proclaims that no one has ever seen God (John 1:18)—which, however, once again does not precisely say that God is invisible. The Epistle to the Hebrews states that Moses persevered against Pharaoh's anger *as though* he had seen the One who is invisible (Heb 11:27). The clearest assertion of God's invisibility comes from the First Epistle to Timothy, which describes God as dwelling in unapproachable light and says no one has ever seen or can see God (1 Tim 1:17, 6:16).

This chapter explores how Christians in particular identified means by which God may be visually discernible. They argued about the implications of the term *image* as applied to the creation of humanity in the image and likeness of God, and about the ways the incarnate Christ was the perfect image of the invisible God. They deliberated passages in the Bible that refer to God's

physical (and visible) attributes, pondered stories of visionary encounters with the Divine Being, and meditated on the promised sight of God's face, given to the pure in heart at the resurrection. What becomes evident in these discussions is that the question is not about whether God was, is, or will be visible but rather about what constitutes a vision of God, who will receive it, and when it will be manifest.

HUMANITY AS THE *IMAGO DEI*

The narrative of creation in Genesis 1 asserts that humans are made in the image and after (or according to) the likeness of God (Gen 1:26-27). This principle is fundamental to Christian theological anthropology in general but also played a role in attacks on pagan gods' images by Christians. Some, like Minucius Felix, claimed that the only proper image of God is a human being, but he did not specify in what this could consist, as he also maintained that God is absolutely invisible.¹ The question of how humans are in God's likeness is also taken up by Irenaeus in his refutation of the gnostics. Here he declares that human bodies are fashioned after the image of the Divine Son. Thus, humans bear the likeness, not only the soul or spirit, but also in their fleshly nature. For Irenaeus, the *imago Dei* is manifest in the complete union of body, soul, and spirit.²

Intent on correcting misguided readings of the Genesis creation story, Origen of Alexandria declared that the *imago Dei* (image of God) is not a bodily resemblance but rather a similitude of mind or intellect.³ In his refutation of Celsus, Origen contends that Celsus does not understand the difference between humans created in the image of God (Gen 1:27) and Christ as the image of God (Col 1:15). Humans are a kind of derived image, while Christ is the true and perfect image of God. Even this, however, needs some elaboration, so Origen continues by maintaining that the term *likeness* in Genesis applies to that which exists in the soul or mind—resemblance in reason, not in any kind of bodily form or external appearance.⁴ Origen nevertheless recognized that many Christians read scripture texts literally, especially Genesis 1:26. For him, however, belief in the deity's incorporeality meant that humans cannot have any physical similarities to the Creator. Rather, their rational faculties, like God, are invisible, incorporeal, and immortal. That humans have bodies at all is a result of the originally created, purely spiritual, rational beings' initial fall out of stable union with and continual contemplation of God.⁵

The fourth-century theologian and historian Eusebius of Caesarea concurred with this understanding. He maintained that the meaning of God's fashioning humans after God's image and likeness lies only in their ability to make judgments about wisdom, righteousness, and virtue. He also held that the outward form of a person, while a

work of God, is essentially different from that of God.⁶ Eusebius cited Philo of Alexandria in arguing that although humans possess the most godlike image of any living thing, the *imago Dei* consists in the human rational capacity and has nothing to do with corporeal or physical likeness.⁷ This position, as initially articulated by Origen, then became the standard way that early Christian writers construed this line from the Genesis creation story.

Around the same time that Origen composed his refutation of Celsus, Jewish rabbis were debating how to interpret those scriptural passages that imply God's physical attributes. It seems that the rabbis never denied that God has a body; the pertinent question was what kind of body.⁸ The rabbis never assumed that God's form looked exactly like the human one; rather, they regarded the *imago Dei* as a matter of function and not external appearance. Nor did they distinguish between the terms *image* and *likeness* but instead saw them as synonymous, both reflecting the beauty and the glory of God.⁹

In this respect, rabbinic anthropology differed somewhat from that of Philo, who believed that *imago Dei* refers only to human rational capacity.¹⁰ Yet in addition to asserting this, Philo could define Israel as a people with the capacity to see God, by which he meant that the devoted, engaged in cultic service, are endowed with a unique gift of visionary contemplation by which they receive direct revelation and comprehend the Divine One.¹¹ Extending this idea of spiritual vision to Jewish mystical literature of

the second and third centuries CE prompted meditation on the implications of accounts of personal and visual encounters with God that included different parts of the divine body.^{[12](#)}

A century or more later, Augustine of Hippo responded to a series of questions raised by his monastic colleagues. One of the topics he addressed was how humanity was created in God's image and likeness. He opens his answer by citing Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians, which distinguishes between the outer self (ἐξω ἡμῶν ἄνθρωπος), which is wasting away, and the inner self (ἐσω ἡμῶν), which is being daily renewed (1 Cor 4:16). Augustine explains that the outer person is bodily and identifies it with Adam, while "the inner person" refers to the soul, which he identifies with Christ. When Adam fell, humanity lost the image and likeness of God in respect to the inner person (Christ), although it retained the outer (Adam). Christ's coming made the inner person's renewal possible, while the outer self, which continues to decay, will be restored in the future resurrection. Augustine goes on to point out that Paul's distinctions are crucial because being *in* the image and likeness of God is different from actually *being* the image and likeness of God, which pertains only to the Son. Yet although Augustine identifies salvation with the renewal of the inner image, he insists that the human "outer person" can be said to be *after* God's image, insofar as it exists, possesses reason, stands erect on two feet, and,

although it has no life of its own, is made alive by the presence of its soul.[13](#)

THE BIBLICAL GOD'S HUMAN FEATURES

Beyond the story of humans' creation as the *imago Dei*, God's purported invisibility is challenged by allusions to the deity's physical features and stories of prophets and seers having visions of God. In the Old Testament, Isaiah sees the Lord sitting on a lofty throne with the hem of his robe filling the temple (Isa 6:1). Ezekiel perceives something like a human form, surrounded by fire and rainbow-hued splendor and with a substance like gleaming amber above its loins (Ezek 1:26–28, 8:2). Daniel watches the Ancient of Days taking his throne, garbed in snowy white raiment and with hair like pure wool (Dan 7:9). Elsewhere the Bible describes God as having fingers, hands, arms, and eyes (e.g., Exod 31:18; Ps 31:5, 31:15, 44:3; Isa 49:16; 2 Kings 19:16; Ezek 8:3). God walks in the Garden and calls out to Adam and Eve (Gen 3:8–9). The psalmist pleads, like Moses, to see God's face (Ps 27:8–9) and laments, "God has hidden his face and we will never see it" (Ps 10:11, 13:1).[14](#)

In the New Testament book of Revelation, the seer John glimpses someone like the Son of Man, with a long robe, white hair, bronzed feet, blazing eyes, and a shining face (Rev 1:12). The vision speaks, instructing John to write down what he sees and announcing that he is the living one, the first and the last, the one who holds the keys of

Death and Hades (Rev 1:17-20). Later John perceives a figure seated on a throne, looking like jasper and carnelian, holding a scroll, and surrounded by four living creatures and worshiped by twenty-four elders, crowned in gold and garbed in white robes (Rev 4:3-5:1). Finally, between the elders and the four living creatures, the revelator perceives a lamb with seven horns and seven eyes and sees all the creatures in heaven and earth fall down prostrate in awe, singing a hymn of praise to the one seated on the throne and to the lamb (Rev 5:6-14).

Some cynics evidently concluded that Christians take literally such biblical descriptions of God as speaking, walking around, and sitting on a throne and believe the deity has human characteristics. The pagan critic Celsus, for example, commenting on the teaching that God ceased the work of creation on the seventh day, apparently remarked that no true god could become fatigued, as only mortals have feeble bodies subject to weariness.^{[15](#)} Origen defensively countered that such expressions should be understood figuratively and that although scripture uses words that apply human traits to God, it is absurd to think humans truly know anything of God, for the deity's attributes are far beyond what the human mind is acquainted with or can even imagine.^{[16](#)}

Like Celsus, others supposed the biblical references to God's physical features were meant literally and judged them ridiculous. In his *Confessions*, Augustine recalls how his Manichaean teachers caused him to be ashamed of the

Bible, in particular by implying that the teaching that humans were created in God's image suggests that God has a physical, humanlike body. Manichaeans evidently used the Genesis creation story as proof of the Bible's absurdities.^{[17](#)} Once Augustine began to study with Ambrose of Milan, however, he discerned a way to preclude their assertions that scripture presents God as anthropomorphic:

Although I had not the least notion or even an obscure suspicion how there could be spiritual substance, yet I was glad, if also ashamed, to discover that I had been barking for years not against the Catholic faith but against mental figments of physical images. My rashness and impiety lay in the fact that what I ought to have verified by investigation I had simply asserted as an accusation. You who are most high and most near, most secret and most present, have no bodily members, some larger, others smaller, but are everywhere a whole and never limited in space. You are certainly not our physical shape. Yet you made humanity in your image, and man from head to foot is contained in space.^{[18](#)}

BIBLICAL THEOPHANIES

Despite Christian apologists' denial of an anthropomorphic God, the Bible contains passages that not only depict the deity with human physical attributes but also chronicle a number of theophanies in which God has a human form. One of these theophanies engages Abraham, to whom God appears as three men (Gen 18:1).^{[19](#)} Another comes to Jacob, who claims that he has seen God face to face after he wrestles a mysterious man in the night (Gen 32:30). Moses, Aaron, and seventy of the elders of Israel see God

upon a pavement of sapphires; they eat and drink in the divine presence (Exod 24:10–22). In one of the most poignant passages of scripture, after Moses pleads to see God’s face, he is warned that no one can look upon God’s face and live (which implies that God indeed has a visible, if dangerous, visage). Instead, he is allowed a glimpse of God’s back (Exod 33:17–23). This text, however, appears after a passage in the same chapter that says Moses used to speak to God face to face, as one speaks to a friend (Exod 33:11). The book of Numbers even presents God as telling Aaron and Miriam, “With him [Moses] I speak face to face—clearly, not in riddles; and he beholds the form of the Lord” (Num 12:8).

All these could be regarded as instances of divine condescension to human need and not confined to any single outward manifestation. Furthermore, some theophanies were not anthropomorphic. God also appeared as a burning bush, a blinding light, a pillar of cloud, and—as in the book of Revelation—an enthroned lamb. Nevertheless, while some Old Testament scriptures maintain that seeing God is either impossible or deadly (e.g., “no one can see God and live” [Exod 33:20]), they also indicate that certain chosen ones may survive an indirect or mediated theophanic experience.

Christians needed to parse these accounts according to which Divine Person was said to be manifest. Reading scriptural passages that refer to God’s hands, face, lap, arms, or feet as metaphorical and not literal does not

require distinguishing among the three Persons of the Trinity, at least in regard to the deity's potential visibility or corporeality. The stories of theophanies, however, raise the problem of which Divine Person spoke to Adam in the Garden, met Abraham at the door of his tent, or wrestled with Jacob at Peniel.

For example, while Justin Martyr criticized Jews for evidently believing that the unbegotten Father could have human features, he allowed that the begotten Son might and claimed that this is the one in the theophanies in the Hebrew scriptures. Justin specifically suggested that when Moses encountered the burning bush, he encountered the Son rather than the Father.^{[20](#)} In his dialogue with the Jew Trypho, Justin likewise explains that the One who appeared to Abraham at Mamre was the Divine Word, accompanied by two angels, sent according to his will by the One, who remains in the celestial sphere and never is visible to humans nor has direct communication with them.^{[21](#)} In sum, from Moses's beholding of the burning bush to Jacob's wrestling with the man at Peniel, Justin interprets all instances of God's appearance to the patriarchs and prophets as manifestations of the Second Person. He insists that this distinction between the unbegotten God and the Word is necessary to clarify the absolute invisibility (and inaudibility) of the First Person, who, he says, has neither eyes or ears nor comes to earth, walks, sleeps, or wakes up but remains where he is, utterly transcendent and indescribable.^{[22](#)}

Theophilus of Antioch (ca. 169–82) similarly argued that it was the Divine Word who called out to and appeared to Adam and Eve. He held that the Word is God's agent, going wherever and for whatever purpose God wills. The Word is the visible form of God, and so able to be both seen and heard in a divinely designated place and to interact with selected humans. However, Theophilus carefully differentiated the Word from the pagan sons of gods who are begotten through sexual intercourse. Rather, the Word is the firstborn of creation and the eternal, divine Reason, by which all of creation comes into being.^{[23](#)}

Irenaeus of Lyon also tried to reconcile his belief in the inherent invisibility of God with the biblical accounts of theophanies. Nevertheless, in his aim to protect the unity of God against the gnostics, and fearing that distinguishing the Son from the Father would accord with an idea of two unequal gods (one immutable and the other able to morphically change), he proposed a proleptic solution: that the future coming of Christ was foreshadowed in those Old Testament manifestations. This, to him, was proof of God's preordained plan for the salvation of humanity. Thus, to allow events to have happened as scripture describes them, Irenaeus maintained that what the patriarchs and prophets saw when they saw God was a vision of the future, when the Son would come as the incarnate Christ. In his development of this theory, the Divine Word is invisible, incorporeal, and uncircumscribable, like God, but will at some point become human, so those who saw God in earlier

times saw the future manifestation of God as he would appear in the person of Christ. In this way, God was personally, provisionally, and providentially visible to the prophets and patriarchs, although fully revealed only in the incarnation. Moreover, in the End Times, the Son will lead all those who love God into the Divine Presence, and they will see God's glory and, by that glory, receive immortality and truly know both God and themselves (cf. 1 John 3:2).[24](#)

By contrast with Irenaeus and more in line with Justin Martyr, Tertullian asserted the actual, historical, human, and fleshly appearance of the Second Person in biblical theophanies. He contended this against the teachings of his adversary Marcion, who denied the incarnation and was generally opposed to any fleshly or corporeal understanding of the Divine Being. For Tertullian, then, the Old Testament theophanies were examples that he could deploy as rebuttals. He cited the story of Abraham's visitors and Jacob's angelic wrestler as proof that the Second Person of the Trinity could assume human form without any loss of dignity. In fact, he concluded, the assumption of a human appearance confirmed the Son's ability to undergo external change and remain invulnerable to the dangers of the flesh.[25](#)

Origen took a different, far less materialistic view of the Old Testament theophanies, especially in arguments against those who claimed that the God of the Old Testament was inferior to the supreme deity revealed by Christ. Origen admitted that scripture appears to refer to

different deities, one visible and one invisible. He also allowed that the fourth gospel's claim that no one has ever seen God (John 1:18) seems to contradict the accounts of God's visible appearance to Moses and others. While he acknowledged that this contradiction could be resolved by asserting, as some Christian sects (e.g., gnostics) did, that the Hebrew scriptures and the New Testament portray dissimilar gods, he also cited New Testament texts that identify Christ as the one who makes God known, although, he clarified, not literally visible to bodily eyes (see Matt 11:27). Hence, he interpreted Jesus's response to Philip's request to be shown the Father, "If you have seen me, you have seen the Father," as referring to his earlier statement "If you know me, you will know the Father" (John 14:7). Yet Origen understood the vocabulary of sight in these instances as allegorical and indicating intellectual perception rather than physical vision.²⁶ Furthermore, he insisted that occurrences like Abraham's theophany at Mamre must be understood as spiritual or mystical and not actual, visible appearances of the Divine Trinity.²⁷

Origen's contemporary Novatian, the mid-third-century theologian and schismatic bishop of Rome, likewise tried to resolve the question of what the patriarchs saw when they experienced a manifestation of divine presence. Writing one of the first Latin treatises on the Trinity, he argued, like Justin and Tertullian, that the Divine Word had the essential capability of being visible to human sight, and maintained that since scripture cannot lie, God truly appeared in those

cases. But, he clarified, it was the Son and not the Father who was seen. Moreover, he claimed that this appearance was a foreshadowing of the fact that the Son would one day be visible on earth. This, he explained, was a divine concession to human frailty, insofar as the Son's appearance was intended to help accustom people to the coming of Christ in human form. This was necessary, he said, because things are dangerous if they happen suddenly. He made the analogy to the blindness one experiences when coming out of darkness into bright light.^{[28](#)} Thus, he said, the appearance of the Word to the patriarchs and prophets was God's way of gradually helping humans adapt to Christ's eventual incarnate appearance and finally to the promised face-to-face encounter with God at the resurrection.^{[29](#)}

In a similar vein, Eusebius of Caesarea maintained that the Second Person was able to take on human form and appeared to Abraham in that guise. Eusebius regarded the unchangeability of the First Person as crucial, while allowing that the Second Person's ability to take on human form made it possible for God to appear, if in some indistinct or enigmatic mode, to Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, and Ezekiel.^{[30](#)} In a different work, Eusebius insists that all these appearances were granted only to individuals whom God judged to be perfect and thus chose to behold the future incarnate form of Christ. Theophanies in other than human form (e.g., burning bush or pillar of cloud) were given to less perfect human witnesses as a way of

protecting them from a spectacle they could not withstand.³¹ In all, however, these early Christian interpreters believed that certain privileged persons could—and did—perceive the preincarnate Son or Logos in a human form.

Augustine was aware that this distinction among the Persons of the Trinity—that one would or could choose to be manifest in a human form—contradicts the teaching that all three were identical in their activity and indistinguishable in their nature. In his letter to a laywoman named Paulina, he explains that to assert that the Son is visible in a way that the Father and the Holy Spirit are not is to fall into the heresy of the Arians—a problem that arose most vividly in the fourth century. So rather than confronting those who perceive different Persons of the Trinity or alternative manifestations of a single Diving Being (i.e., the heresy of modalism), Augustine maintains that all three Persons are equally invisible and that when God appeared to selected humans, it was in the form chosen by God’s collective will and not according to nature.³² Accordingly, Augustine refused to allow that Abraham had a visit from God, as either the Second Person or the Holy Trinity. Rather, he insisted, Abraham’s guests were angels and, as such, figures of the Trinity but not actually God. Surely, Augustine said, the Son would not have been perceived in human form before his incarnation—when he “emptied himself, taking the form of a servant” (Phil 2:7).³³

DEPICTIONS OF GOD IN EARLY CHRISTIAN ART

The pictorial illustration of some theophanies in early Christian narrative art may reflect interpretations of them as appearances of God.³⁴ Among the most striking are depictions of Abraham welcoming his three visitors (Gen 18:1). Some are ambiguous. For instance, a fourth-century wall painting in Rome's Via Latina catacomb shows Abraham conversing with three identical young men. The three, beardless and dressed in tunics and pallia, are not necessarily angels, but neither are they given any identifying attributes that would suggest they represent the Holy Trinity. Abraham's fattened calf stands next to him, ready to be slaughtered and served as dinner for the guests.

In his treatise *Proof of the Gospels*, Eusebius mentions a picture he once saw at the site of Mamre. According to him, the image showed three figures seated at Abraham's table, with the one in the center exceeding the other two in glory.³⁵ While this image no longer exists (if it ever did), it has a parallel in a later portrayal of this same episode, an early fifth-century mosaic panel in Rome's Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore. This composition follows Eusebius's interpretation of the Genesis passage more than Augustine's, insofar as the central figure in the upper register is surrounded by a glowing aureole or mandorla that sets him apart from his two companions (see fig. 3.1).



FIGURE 3.1 Mosaic panel showing Abraham's hospitality, nave of the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome, ca. 435. (Photo: Scala / Art Resource, NY.)

Another example, from the sixth-century mosaics in Ravenna's Basilica of San Vitale, shows the evolution of the image of Abraham's guests. Here the three youthful-looking visitors are more or less identical, each with a halo (see fig. 3.2). Abraham serves them the calf, with Sarah in a booth

to the side observing the scene. To the right, as Abraham prepares to sacrifice Isaac, the hand of God (*manus Dei*) reaches down from the clouds. In time, the identity of Abraham's three guests as angels became more settled, and the iconography of Abraham's hospitality generally shows them with wings and haloes. However, even when wings clearly identify the three as angels, traditional interpretations of the iconography, especially of Andrei Rublev's famous sixteenth-century icon (see fig. 3.3), tend to identify them as each symbolizing a member of the Holy Trinity, based on the differing colors of their garments, positions of their hands, or directions of their gazes.^{[36](#)}



FIGURE 3.2 Sanctuary mosaic of Abraham's hospitality and offering of Isaac, Basilica of San Vitale, Ravenna, ca. 540. (Photo by the author.)



FIGURE 3.3 Andrei Rublev, icon of the hospitality of Abraham, now in the Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow. (Photo: Scala / Art Resource, NY.)

Other examples of divine depictions in early Christian art include anthropomorphic representations of the three Persons of the Holy Trinity creating Adam and Eve.^{[37](#)} In one composition the three have varying features: The figure on the right has long curly hair and is beardless, while the

seated figure in the center—probably intended to represent God the Father—is fully bearded (see fig. 3.4). The Person behind the Father’s chair has hair that is more closely cropped and a less bushy beard. A similar group on the so-called Dogmatic Sarcophagus in the Vatican Museo Pio Cristiano shows the three as more or less identical, although only one of them, God the Father, is seated, while the other two stand. By contrast, another sarcophagus relief, from Arles, shows only God the Father (again seated) present to receive the offerings of Cain and Abel (see fig. 3.5).



FIGURE 3.4 The Trinity creating Adam and Eve, detail from an early fourth-century sarcophagus now in the Musée départemental Arles antique. (Inv. no. PAP.1974.1; used with permission of the museum. Photo by the author.)



FIGURE 3.5 Detail from the lid of an early Christian sarcophagus showing Cain and Abel presenting their offerings to God, first quarter of the fourth century, now in the Musée départemental Arles antique. (Inv. no. PAP.7400.1/5; used with permission of the museum. Photo by the author.)

CHRIST AS THE VISIBLE GOD

Resolving the question of how to interpret the Old Testament theophanies may have prompted early Christian writers to nuance their understanding of God's invisibility and incorporeality with regard to the Second Person's human incarnation. While some, like Augustine, denied that the preincarnate Son had been perceived in human form, they admitted that when the Word became flesh and came down to earth, he could, in fact, then be seen with bodily eyes. The assertions in the Epistle to the Colossians that "he is the image of the invisible God" (Col 1:15) and in the Epistle to the Hebrews that "he is the exact imprint of God's very being" (Heb 1:3) are key to this point and are echoed in Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians, which says that "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God" shines forth in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor 4:6).

Thus, in some aspect, the invisible divine image became visibly manifest—in a bodily way—while Christ was living on earth. This did not have to mean that the First Person of the Trinity was visible. The prologue to the fourth gospel clarifies: "No one has ever seen God; it is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known" (John 1:18). This phrase has an echo in Matthew 11:27: "No one knows the Father, except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." These passages, according to Augustine in his letter to Paulina, demonstrate that Christ's revelation of God is an intelligible, not a sensible, one. Augustine explains that Philip both saw and did not see the Father, insofar as Christ

was not visibly known to his apostles in his true self. In that sense he cannot be seen, even when he is physically present. Augustine further cites the exceptional example of Moses, who, although he was told that no one can see God's face and live, was allowed to see and hear God, but only once his mind was detached from his mortal body in a state of intense ecstasy parallel to complete death.[38](#)

Nevertheless, Jesus's incarnation—his corporeal and visible appearance in human form—meant that Christians had to reconsider traditional assertions about God's absolute invisibility. In Christ, the divine was comprehended both intelligibly *and* sensibly, and not merely as "veiled in flesh" but in rare glimpses of God's sublime glory, as in the transfiguration event. The incarnation was truly a way in which the invisible God was revealed, in a kind of mediating image or encounter. Even Origen, the defender of the deity's absolute invisibility and ineffability, spoke of the incarnation as a process by which humans were gradually adjusted to seeing the glory of God and became able to endure (and survive) the experience.[39](#) Yet as Augustine argued, unless one sees with the eyes of faith, one cannot truly see, even if the body of the Incarnate One is physically present.[40](#)

Other theologians were more convinced of the importance of physically—and not just mentally—seeing God. Athanasius, the fourth-century bishop of Alexandria and champion of Nicene orthodoxy, wrote a two-part apology in which he gives a blistering critique of pagan

idolatry. Among other points, he claims that those who pay homage to images ignore and dishonor the craftsmen who made them. They worship the products of the skilled artisans rather than paying tribute to the artists themselves. Athanasius then condemns idols for being as phony as the gods they depict, maintaining that those who venerate them are deluded, impious, and irrational. Yet despite this denunciation, Athanasius acknowledges that Christians are like these pagans in one important respect: they recognize that “seeing” God is crucial for their comprehension of the Divine Being.[41](#)

Thus, Athanasius has a different understanding of God’s visibility or invisibility. While he never denies that God remains incorporeal and invisible, Athanasius believes that the Divine Word became incarnate because it was essential to his salvific mission. In the constructive second part of his treatise *On the Incarnation*, Athanasius lays out what he judges to be the orthodox explanation for God’s coming to the world in human form. Here he propounds a theology of visibility that he intends as a divine antidote to the deception of idolatry. He asserts that God is not hidden from sight but evident in myriad ways and forms, including the beauties of creation (see Rom 1:20). Yet mortals are often tricked into mistaking deceptive images for true ones or offering the adoration due to the invisible Divine Being to mundane and even demonic visible objects, being so distracted by worldly things that they confuse illusions with reality.[42](#)

For this reason, Athanasius maintains, the merciful and loving God first sent the law and prophets to instruct people in how to live virtuously. Wanting to redeem this perishing creation when humans persisted in evil habits, God condescended to become physically and visibly present to the world. Therefore, in the incarnation of the Word—in a mortal body—humanity might be confronted with its original image and likeness. To illustrate this, Athanasius employs an analogy from the work of a portrait painter: “For as when a figure painted on wood has been soiled by dirt from outside, it is necessary for him whose figure it is to come again, so that the image can be renewed on the same material—because of his portrait even the material on which it is painted is not cast aside, but the portrait is reinscribed on it. In the same way the all-holy Son of the Father, being the Image of the Father, came to our place to renew the human being made according to himself.”[43](#)

In another place, Athanasius describes the renewed soul’s vision of itself as God’s true image—the Word—beheld as if in a mirror, and thereby prompting a recognition of the divine in itself.[44](#) Christ came to be sensibly (visibly) present to creation so that it could realize its original beauty. This is why God made himself visible—not to come down and fix things or to figure out, at close range, how they had come to be broken. It was not sufficient to make a brief corporeal appearance and then immediately sacrifice himself on a cross and die; Christ’s manifestation involved visible deeds that demonstrated

both his power and his purpose. Christ's earthly life included his human birth and death, his resurrection and ascension, and his disclosure of God's care for the well-being of living creatures.⁴⁵ In other words, for the sake of human salvation, the invisible had to become visible for humans to recognize the truth of both God's being and God's redemptive plan for their deliverance. In this way, Athanasius makes a distinction between God's absolute nature, which is invisible, and God's visible presence and earthly deeds. The indivisible union of the Divine Persons is not compromised, insofar as the Father participates in the Son's actions and the Son's divine nature remains incomprehensible. Yet by affirming the visible human nature of the Son, Athanasius moves away from Origen's desire to purge all corporeal ideas about the deity and regards the incarnation as the way humans may behold their true image, realize its potential, and be motivated to imitate what they see. For Athanasius, bodily seeing is a means of knowing, not simply a linguistic expression for something that takes place primarily in the mind.

This process of ascent from material experience to realization of spiritual truth by means of encountering the visible Christ was elaborated by later fourth-century thinkers such as the Cappadocian fathers Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, and Basil of Caesarea. They set the discussion within their defense of the unity of the Godhead against the neo-Arian Eunomius of Cyzicus, who apparently argued that the Unbegotten and the Begotten

Son are alien to each other according to substance. The Cappadocians insisted that because the relationship between the Son and the Father can be likened to that of the image and the model, by gazing upon the Son one beholds the Father, albeit in a purely mental and mediated sense.^{[46](#)}

In his treatise *On the Making of Man*, Gregory of Nyssa considers the ways in which humans bear the divine likeness. He asserts that it has nothing to do with outward form but rather is based on character. He analogizes God's creation of humans, somewhat like Athanasius, to the work of the artist who paints with precisely selected and blended colors to transfer the beauty of the original to the copy. So, Gregory says, God paints a portrait to resemble God's own beauty, but for Gregory, the colors are not visible hues but rather virtues (e.g., purity, alienation from evil, mutual love). He concludes that humans have been given the ability to apprehend this through the faculties of sight and hearing but most of all through the impetus to search out these virtues and the discernment to appreciate how they themselves are truly stamped with the divine likeness.^{[47](#)}

For his part, Gregory's brother Basil argued that because the Son is the perfect image of the Father, the worship of the one includes the other. Here the idea of the image's participation in the prototype is most clearly realized and confirms that sensory perception can assist the viewer in moving beyond the external, physical realm to the internal, intelligible one. Again, using the analogy of visual art, Basil

explained that artists achieve an image's likeness to its model by imitation, while the Son is the true image of God by nature.^{[48](#)}

Augustine had a more nuanced account of how Christ's visible works showed forth his invisible nature. In his *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, he allows that Jesus's miracles were indeed divine works and that they could prompt the human witness to some understanding of God. He comments, however, that Christ's miracles were no more wondrous than God's everyday miracles, such as the emergence of a plant from a seed. Still, he acknowledges that humans in their jadedness need novelty. So God kindly produced wonders that humans would notice, prompting them to marvel at the power and glory of the invisible God through his visible works. While on earth, Christ had a visible face and body. Brought to faith and truth by this means, eventually humans would choose to see the one they first recognized through visible things in a new, spiritual manner.^{[49](#)} In proclaiming his bodily resurrection, Christians believe that Christ continues to be corporeal in some sense and that he will eventually return to earth in a visible, embodied form.

Depictions of Christ as wonder-worker are especially popular in third- and fourth-century Christian iconography, which overwhelmingly portrays his special ministry of healing the sick, raising the dead, multiplying loaves and fish, and turning water to wine (see fig. 3.6). In the fifth-century apse mosaic of Thessaloniki's monastic church of

Hosios David (formerly Moni Latomou), however, the vision of Old Testament prophets is conflated with the seer's image of the Holy One seated on a rainbow throne as described in the book of Revelation (4:3). Here the enthroned figure is identified as Christ, indicated by his cruciform halo and youthful appearance (see fig. 3.7). He is surrounded by a gleaming white aureole pierced by rays of light. The four living creatures from the book of Revelation emerge from the shadows, and to either side the prophets Ezekiel and Habakkuk express their awe at his appearance. The text on the scroll that he holds in his left hand paraphrases a passage from Isaiah (25:9): "Indeed, this is our God, we looked to him and he saved us!"



FIGURE 3.6 Scenes of Jesus as miracle worker, detail from the mid-fourth-century sarcophagus of Marcia Romania, now in the Musée départemental Arles antique. (Inv. no. PAP.74.00.2/6; used with permission of the museum. Photo by the author.)



FIGURE 3.7 Apse mosaic, Church of Hosios David (formerly Moni Latomou), Thessaloniki, ca. late fifth century. (Photo: Hackenberg-Photo-Cologne / Alamy Stock Photo.)

SEEING GOD IN THE RESURRECTION

The claim that the faithful will be granted a vision of God sometime in the future occurs in several places in the New Testament and builds upon Jesus's assurance, given in his Sermon on the Mount, that the pure in heart will see God (Matt 5:8). The promise that the resurrected faithful will not only see God but recognize that they are like him appears elsewhere in the New Testament, notably in the First Epistle of John, which says, "When he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is" (1 John 3:2). This passage is followed by an admonition that echoes the

beatitude from Jesus's Sermon on the Mount: "All who have this hope in him should purify themselves."

Theophilus, the second-century bishop of Antioch, elaborated on this vision in an address to a pagan correspondent, Autolycus, saying that it applies to all those who have purified themselves from such sins as adultery, robbery, slander, and evil thoughts, since iniquity clouds the eyes of the soul like cataracts cloud bodily eyes, preventing them from perceiving God.⁵⁰ While he affirmed that God can be known through and in the mighty work of creation, Theophilus chose to avoid the question of how God will appear to those who achieve the special purified state. Instead, he offered an extended discussion on the folly of image worship and the utter inadequacy of any physical description of God. Then he gave a list of names or titles that might be applied to the unfathomable divine, consistent with what he considered different aspects of God's inscrutable being: light, fire, word, mind, spirit, wisdom, strength, power, providence, lord, judge, and father.⁵¹

When he referred to the special case of the pure in heart, Theophilus made an exception for their state in the afterlife. The promised vision of God will be granted to them, but only after death and in the resurrection at the End Times. For, he said, only the immortal may behold the immortal. This final divine vision corresponds with declarations in other New Testament passages, including the beloved text from Paul's First Epistle to the

Corinthians, which allows that while now the faithful perceive God enigmatically (ἐν αἰνίγματι), they will one day see God face to face (πρόσωπον πρὸς πρόσωπον). While now they know only partially, then they may know fully (1 Cor 13:12).[52](#)

Augustine pondered the nature of this vision of God accorded to the resurrected faithful in two letters written between 408 and 414, one to a widow named Italica and another to the laywoman Paulina (mentioned above), both making points somewhat like those in his letter to the layman Consentius (see chapter 2). His letter of condolence to the widow first assures her that she will be reunited with her husband in the hereafter. Then Augustine turns to the question of how Christians will see God in the resurrection. He contends, against certain unidentified persons, that the promised face-to-face encounter will not be with bodily eyes. He explains that while this reward of faith is real, the vision will be a spiritual and not a carnal experience, because the body that rises will be a spiritual body (see 1 Cor 15:44).[53](#) In his book-length letter to Paulina, Augustine expands on this matter, distinguishing between bodily sight and mental comprehension and between present and postresurrection perception. The second in each pair will be possible only after a cleansing of all carnal desires from the heart and mind, a condition achieved by certain saints prior to death but by most humans only once they rise to eternal life and receive a power of vision like that of the angels.[54](#)

This unmediated vision, beheld only in the resurrection, is the longed-for reward of the just, according to Augustine. That reward, he taught, would be delayed until the Christian was freed from mortality. At that time, true peace would be given by the contemplation of the face of God, which would so satisfy the person that no other desire could pull the mind away.⁵⁵ At the end of his monumental *City of God*, Augustine says that seeing God is the activity of the saints in heaven. But, he asks, how do they see and what do they see? He muses, “But whether they will see him by means of the body—as we now see the sun, the moon, the stars, the sea, the earth, and the things on earth—is no small question.”⁵⁶

He turns to the 1 Corinthians text for an answer and concludes that the bodily eyes will continue to have their place and role after resurrection, although with vastly superior power—a power not like that ascribed to keen-sighted serpents or eagles, which see only corporeal things—including the ability to see incorporeal things, because now they will be used by the spiritual body. He continues, “Consequently, it is possible, and in fact highly probable, that in the world to come we will see the corporeal bodies of the new heaven and the new earth in such a way that, wherever we look, we shall see God with brilliant clarity, everywhere present and governing all things, including bodily things—seeing him both through the bodies we shall be wearing and through the bodies we shall be looking at.”⁵⁷ Either, he concludes, these eyes shall possess a

quality that is akin to the mind, by which they can then discern spiritual things including God, or God will be so known to us and so much before us that the faithful shall see God in themselves, in one another, and in fact in every created thing that exists. When the righteous rise to eternal life, they will be the equals of the angels, and so their vision will be angelic: they will be able to see things that in earthly life were physically imperceptible.[58](#)

CONCLUSION

Early biblical texts that describe theophanies to privileged individuals such as Abraham, Jacob, Daniel, and Isaiah made it possible for some early Christian thinkers to believe that God—in the form of the Second Person or the Divine Logos—could choose to be visible even before Jesus’s incarnate time on earth. While no one could see the Father, the Son could and did appear to certain persons. Moreover, Christians were promised that the righteous would be rewarded with a face-to-face vision of God at their resurrection. Thus, the teaching about God’s absolute invisibility applied primarily to the First Person of the Trinity. To insist that the divine was, is, and always will be imperceptible to human sight is incorrect, if one also declares that God came to earth in human form, and even before the Word’s incarnation.

This belief affected how early Christians judged emerging pictorial depictions of God the Father, Christ, and the saints. As the renderings of Abraham’s hospitality noted

above demonstrate, instances of early Christian pictorial art indicate that portrayals of the preincarnate Word, and even of God the Creator, were not generally regarded as idolatrous fabrications or even as mistaken or heretical affirmations of God's ability to take on a human appearance. Accordingly, early Christians did not avoid making pictures of Christ, especially when depicting gospel stories of healing and working wonders. Moreover, portrayals of God the Father in anthropomorphic form sometimes replaced aniconic or purely symbolic figures, and in certain instances these bore some resemblance to the cult images of the pagan gods. Nevertheless, the fact that Jesus came to earth in a human body and with a human visage made it possible and even essential to depict him in that form. Doing so was not idolatrous but actually an affirmation of this core Christian teaching and rendered it unnecessary to employ only noncorporeal and abstract signs, disembodied hands, or symbolic metaphors. In Christ, God has a face and a body that were, are, and will be seen by those to whom God grants the insight, vision, and awareness to comprehend them.

Although church authorities and theologians occasionally expressed concern about the ways the faithful ought to regard such things, the issue was not so much whether Christians should make images of their God as how they did so and what that expressed about their understanding of the divine nature and the Holy Trinity. Eventually, visual representations might be abandoned as individuals moved

toward fuller knowledge of God, but seeing with bodily eyes is initially valuable, if only insofar as it fosters the viewer's dynamic ascent from sensible things to purely spiritual ones.

As the next chapter will show, by the mid-third century, Christian artists were freely portraying Jesus in scenes of healing, working wonders, and teaching. Sometimes, as discussed above, they even showed God the Father in human form rather than by using a symbolic figure like the *manus Dei*. Thus, the biblical prohibition of graven images and condemnation of idols were almost certainly not aimed at visual representation of the true God, and much less at pictorial art generally. Idolatry was associated broadly with the worship of gods other than the God of Israel and more narrowly with the fabrication and veneration of visual images of those "false" gods.

OceanofPDF.com

4

EARLY CHRISTIAN PICTORIAL ART

From Sacred Narratives to Holy Portraits

If someone desired to see the story of Abraham portrayed in a picture, how would the painter represent him? . . . For it would not be likely or at any rate probable that one would see him doing all the actions mentioned in a single painting.

CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA, *EPISTLE* 41.22

Early Christian writers' ridicule of polytheists' cult images has been repeated through the centuries and into the modern era. While many later critics, like John Calvin and Edward Gibbon, were as mistaken as the early Christian apologists in their assumptions concerning polytheists' ideas about likenesses of their gods, they also often disregarded the existence and character of early Christian pictorial art. For example, Calvin stated that Christians had

no art before the fifth century—a surprising assertion, as it seems likely he would have been at least somewhat aware of the early Christian pictorial iconography in the Roman catacombs. Although those catacombs had been more or less abandoned by the eighth century, they were still visited by pilgrims in the Middle Ages and were reexplored and recorded in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.^{[1](#)}

The material record clearly shows that the earliest recognizable Christian pictorial art appeared in the late second or early third century. Around that time, Christians began decorating their cemeteries, their meeting places, and a variety of small domestic or personal objects (e.g., gems, pottery) initially with symbols like doves, anchors, and boats but within a short time also with figures drawn from biblical narratives. While the preponderance of evidence comes from the environs of Rome and especially from funerary contexts (e.g., the Roman catacombs), other regions of the empire also had this type of art. It is found in a variety of media: wall paintings in catacombs, images on funerary plaques, sarcophagus reliefs, carvings in gems, woven textiles, pottery lamps, and a few statuettes.

Although the emergence of Christian pictorial art in the early third century is undeniable, the fact remains that little evidence for earlier production has been found. This raises three questions: first, did Christians make or use any pictorial art in the first two centuries CE; second, if they did not, why not; and third, what might account for the emergence of visual art at that time?

When it did emerge, early Christian iconography was characterized by the dominance of stock biblical types, often deployed in seemingly random fashion to produce what can seem to modern eyes as rather jumbled compositional schemes. As such, they do not invite a prolonged gaze at any single image, insofar as each is just one part of an interconnected series of discrete biblical episodes. While together they suggest a unified visual affirmation of God's power to deliver the believer from present perils, bodily suffering, and ultimately mortality, missing are the kinds of images that viewers might engage with individually or direct their prayers toward. Moreover, although many late third- and early fourth-century funerary monuments bear portraits of the deceased, they notably lack any similar images of Christ, the apostles, or other holy figures. This changes rather dramatically in the late fourth and early fifth centuries, when Christian iconography transitions from predominantly depicting narrative scenes to favoring portraits of Christ and the saints. This transition implies a correlated alteration of purpose for early Christian art. It moves from being didactic or dogmatic to more devotional in aim.

THE ABSENCE OF ART IN THE FIRST TWO CENTURIES CE

The lack of surviving evidence is usually taken to indicate that Christian figurative art did not exist before the beginning of the third century. As noted above, many historians have regarded the apparent emergence of

pictorial artifacts as signifying a revision in Christian attitudes and practices regarding pictorial imagery around that time. However, this conclusion is problematic, because those second-century apologists who attacked pagan cult images rarely addressed pictorial art in any general sense, much less raised serious concerns about Christian iconography specifically. Even those writing in the third century said little, either negative or positive, about the role or content of Christian visual art, of which they were likely aware. This suggests that its emergence was unrelated to contemporaneous theological discussion about the potential value of images or the problem of idolatry.

Although surviving documents provide little insight into how theologians judged the matter, the lack of explicitly Christian visual imagery does suggest that prior to the third century, self-identified Christians neither produced nor owned objects that displayed distinctive aspects of their beliefs or practices. Varying explanations try to account for this. As discussed in chapter 1, Henry Chadwick presumes in his survey of church history that early Christians collectively observed the biblical interdiction of graven images and idols (e.g., Exod 20:4-5) and understood it to ban all types of visual art. Those who share Chadwick's assessment often suppose that Christians were influenced by Jewish aniconism.² Others, like Ernst Kitzinger, maintain that early Christians were focused more on attaining heavenly rewards than on obtaining earthly goods.³ Citing Jesus's words to the Samaritan woman in

the Gospel of John “The hour is coming, and is now here, when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth” (John 4:23), Kitzinger concludes that early Christians anticipated the end of the world and so eschewed material possessions.⁴ Yet another explanation claims that the early Christian communities lacked sufficient financial means to purchase material objects distinctively decorated or designed to reflect their specific religious sensibilities.⁵

More recently, scholars have argued that the issue is either moot or just more complicated: Christians availed themselves of objects with pictorial imagery, but as the faith emerged within the Greco-Roman world’s common visual culture, their artifacts were basically indistinguishable from those of non-Christians.⁶ This could point more to a reconceptualizing of existing visual vocabulary rather than a lack of identity.⁷ Neutral themes, such as maritime or harvesting scenes, and mythological figures like Hermes, Herakles, Endymion, Alcestis, and Orpheus could be adapted to express Christian beliefs about the afterlife.⁸ Such adaptation does not have to imply syncretism or pluralistic religious affiliation.⁹ It might even account for the blending of pagan mythological iconography with biblical scenes in some places: for example, the decorated cubicula in the Via Latina catacomb, which depict Herakles and Admetus as well as Daniel and Moses, or the appearance of Orpheus alongside Jonah or the Good Shepherd. These juxtapositions may seem conflicting to modern eyes but apparently were not

disturbingly discordant to ancient patrons or other viewers.^{[10](#)}

Diverse accounts for the apparent paucity of distinctively Christian art—indeed, of Christian material culture in general (e.g., church buildings, liturgical implements, sacred books)—during the religion’s first two centuries often correspond to various proposed reasons for its eventual emergence. As noted earlier, some historians have argued that episcopal authorities gradually relaxed their scruples or lifted the ban on pictorial images during the third century as less fervent members of the laity desired to emulate their pagan neighbors. According to this reasoning, despite their disapproval, these leaders tolerated art for private homes, communally shared tombs, and eventually spaces of worship.^{[11](#)} Two other explanations may be the simplest and perhaps the most plausible: First, it wasn’t until the third century that the Christian community increased in size, visibility, political security, and economic resources. Second, to obtain objects bearing a distinctive iconography of their own, Christian clients would have needed access to workshops and artisans who were not necessarily Christian themselves and thus would have had to develop the new types from scratch.

THE EARLIEST ICONOGRAPHIC SUBJECTS

As noted above, among the first subjects to appear in Christian pictorial art were religiously adaptable symbols like the dove, anchor, ship, and fish, to which Christians might attribute their own religious significance. The sheep bearer, understood as the biblical Good Shepherd, was another favorite, and his painted depiction often occupies the center of the vault in Christian hypogea. While handbooks of early Christian art often refer to the Good Shepherd as a depiction of Christ, it was more likely a reference to Jesus's attributes as a loving caretaker (see John 10:11) than a portrait of him.¹² The shepherd and all the other mentioned figures are found painted on the walls of catacombs, carved on funerary plaques and sarcophagi, and molded or etched on small personal and domestic items like rings, dishes, and lamps.¹³

That such figures were in common use is evident from a passage in a work by Clement of Alexandria. Clement vehemently opposed idol worship and crafted a philosophically informed argument against images in general, declaring that artists' fabrications are inherently derivative, deceptive, and distracting, drawing viewers' attention from heavenly realities to mundane matters. Yet in one well-known paragraph from *Christ the Teacher*, he gives instructions about the appropriate images that Christians might choose to display on their signet rings: "Let the seals [of our rings] be of a dove or fish or ship in full sail or of a musical lyre, such as Polycrates used, or of a ship's anchor, like the one Seleucus had engraved in an

intaglio; or, if anyone be a fisherman, let him make an image of the Apostles and of the children drawn out of the water. No representation of an idol may be impressed on the ring, for we are forbidden to possess such an image, nor may a sword or bow, for we cultivate peace, nor a drinking cup, for we practice temperance.”[14](#)

Clement’s recommendations demonstrate not only that Christians owned objects with simple symbols that referred to their baptism or displayed their religious affiliation (e.g., doves, fish, ships) but also that they were expressly advised to avoid images of pagan gods and devices deemed unsuitable for peace-loving and sober adherents to their faith (e.g., swords, bows, drinking cups). Yet Clement’s mention of images used by the pagans Polycrates and Seleucus also illustrates how Christians assigned their own meaning to existing symbols. Conventional fishing scenes could allude to Christ’s instructions to his apostles to become fishers of persons or perhaps to the newly baptized, who were “drawn out of the water.”[15](#) Similarly, depictions of grape or wheat harvesting could signify the Eucharist or the ingathering of the faithful at the End Times. Doves, peacocks, and dolphins were favorite decorative motifs in Roman art; to Christians, a dove might signify the Holy Spirit or the deliverance of Noah, a peacock or dolphin the anticipated resurrection of the body.[16](#) Other religiously ambiguous images include a figure standing in the prayer posture (orans) and diners reclining at a semicircular table set with fish and loaves.

Such subjects could also be found in non-Christian contexts and given different interpretations depending on the viewer's sensibilities.^{[17](#)}

Clement's list of acceptable symbols therefore accords with a view that most early Christian artifacts were produced by workshops that catered to a variety of clients, including Jews and polytheists.^{[18](#)} Presumably, customers and artisans alike exercised discernment about the images they respectively chose or made. In fact, known examples of early Christian rings largely correspond to Clement's suggestions, with depictions of fish, boats, anchors, shepherds, lambs, and even biblical characters like Jonah (see fig. 4.1).^{[19](#)} Buyers likewise purchased small domestic and personal objects like lamps and glassware with images that reflected their taste, character, and religious sympathies. At least one other early Christian writer mentioned such items. Tertullian described cups adorned with images of the Good Shepherd; unlike Clement, however, he discussed them with displeasure, if only because he associated such objects with *The Shepherd of Hermas*, an early Christian text that allows some leniency toward sinners.^{[20](#)} These cups might have been eucharistic chalices or perhaps glass vessels with gold-decorated details like those found in the catacombs (see fig. 4.2).



FIGURE 4.1 Ring with oval gem with the story of Jonah, east Mediterranean manufacture, Rome, late third or early fourth century CE. (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Accession number 03.1008. Bartlett Collection— museum purchase with funds from the Francis Bartlett Donation of 1900. Photo reproduced by permission of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts.)



FIGURE 4.2 Glass roundel fragment with shepherd and flock, 300–399. The inscription reads “Dignitas amicorum pie zeses vivas” (Worthy among your friends! Drink that you may live! May you live!). (Image licensed by the Corning Museum of Glass, Corning, NY [www.comog.org], under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0. Photo courtesy of the Corning Museum.)

These religiously ambiguous and adaptable symbols were soon joined by identifiable biblical subjects. Initially, these subjects were predominantly drawn from Old Testament narratives and constituted a fairly limited repertoire. Catacomb paintings and sarcophagus reliefs regularly depicted the temptation of Adam and Eve, Abraham offering Isaac, Moses striking the rock in the wilderness,

Daniel in the lion's den, the three Hebrew youths in the fiery furnace, and Susannah and the elders. Sequential episodes from the story of Jonah were especially popular and show him cast overboard into the mouth of the waiting sea creature, spit up again, and reclining under a pergola on dry land. The fact that the iconography avoids any reference to his call to convert the Ninevites or his disgruntled response suggests that it was intended not to narrate Jonah's story but rather to allude to his divine deliverance from death. It is thus a fitting tomb decoration.

A similarly limited catalog of scenes from New Testament was gradually added to those from the Hebrew Bible and includes the adoration of the Magi, Jesus's baptism, his entrance into Jerusalem, and his working such miracles and wonders as multiplying loaves and fishes, changing water to wine, healing the sick and disabled, and raising Lazarus (see fig. 3.6). To modern eyes, the almost complete absence of visual references to Christ's passion, death, and resurrection is striking. Rather than the incarnation, salvific sacrifice, or glorified resurrection and enthronement of the divine Son as summarized in the articles of the early creeds, the iconography emphasizes Jesus's earthly ministry and particularly his miracles, which again points to the importance of these stories as intimations of divine deliverance from ailments, dangers, and death.^{[21](#)} In addition to these biblical narratives, some stories from the apocryphal Acts of Peter and Paul began to

appear. Among the most prevalent are Peter's arrest and his striking the rock to baptize his Roman jailers.

ARTISTIC STYLE AND COMPOSITION

Many historians have resisted referring to the earliest Christian pictorial images as "art," at least in the way that modern art historians might define it, or evaluating it primarily on the basis of originality, style, or other aesthetic features.²² Because so many examples are judged to be of relatively poor quality or stylistically crude, it seems most useful to attend to their subject matter and message—the core of their value as historical artifacts—rather than to their beauty or the evident skill of the artisans who made them.²³ As these objects are important witnesses to the visual imagination and production of their makers and owners, early Christian "art"—the term used advisedly—might be defined as much by what it tells us about the social, cultural, and religious context of its clientele as by how it measures up against more polished works of the same period.

Although the limited subjects in the repertoire of early Christian iconography have a discernible similarity, no two are identical. In addition, most are abbreviated references to their source narrative rather than fully developed illustrations of a particular story. In this way they function somewhat like pictograms, which makes it problematic even to refer to them as narratives. Moreover, novice

viewers typically need some assistance in recognizing them. For example, Noah appears by himself, standing in a plain ark-type box floating on some wavy blue lines indicating water instead of in a boat loaded with wives, sons, and pairs of animals. This kind of iconography simply registered a single moment in a biblical text, perhaps a solution to a problem described by Cyril of Alexandria:

If someone desired to see the story of Abraham portrayed in a picture, how would the painter represent him? Could it be done in a single painting showing him doing all the things mentioned, or in successive pictures and distinctively, or in different images? In one picture, Abraham sits on his donkey, taking his son along and followed by his servants; in another one, again, with the donkey staying behind down below along with the servants, and Isaac being burdened with the wood while Abraham holds in his hands the knife and the fire? Indeed, in a different painting, Abraham takes a different pose after he has bound the youth upon the wood and his right hand is armed with a sword in order that he might start the sacrifice? But this would not be a different Abraham each time (although he is seen most of the time in a different pose) but would be the same man in every instance with the skill of the artist continually disposing him according to the needs of the subject matter. For it would not be likely or at any rate probable that one would see him doing all the actions mentioned in a single painting.²⁴

The abbreviated style of early Christian iconography contrasts strikingly with the developed compositions of particular myths found on roughly contemporaneous pagan monuments, especially sarcophagus friezes. Furthermore, the Christian scenes are typically combined, in a jumbled or apparently random manner. This is especially evident on Christian sarcophagi whose sculpted reliefs appear crammed with seemingly unrelated characters lifted from

various Bible stories. This kind of mix also appears in the singular example of the Dura Europos house church, whose baptismal chamber was embellished with wall paintings that included depictions of Jesus healing the paralytic, Jesus walking upon the water, David and Goliath, Adam and Eve, and the Good Shepherd.

Both the abbreviated compositions and the juxtaposition of narrative scenes indicate that the intended viewers did not typically discern discrete narrative episodes in this art but rather would have seen each figure as one part of a comprehensive message. That message seems to have been one of salvation. The individual figures represent instances of God's deliverance, examples of faithful witness to the true God, or occasions when Christ revealed his divine power and identity. In a funerary setting—the context of a great proportion of the surviving objects—depictions of divine rescue from danger or death, as in the narratives of Noah, Jonah, and Lazarus, would have been fundamentally reassuring.²⁵ Yet in some cases the choices of scenes may have been inspired by typological pairing of Old and New Testament stories, such as Daniel with the adoration of the Magi or Abraham's offering of Isaac on one side balanced by Jesus standing before Pilate on the other (see fig. 4.3). In this instance, Isaac may be a prefiguration of Christ, both of them willing sacrifices.



FIGURE 4.3 Mid-fourth-century Christian columnar sarcophagus, showing Abraham offering Isaac, Jesus giving the Law, and Jesus before Pilate, now in the Grotto of Saint Peter's Basilica. (Photo: Scala / Art Resource, NY.)

Other theological concepts could be implied in the combination of certain scenes. For example, Noah is often juxtaposed to the three Hebrew youths in the fiery furnace, perhaps to suggest God's deliverance of the faithful from trials of water and fire (see fig. 4.4). In many portrayals of the three youths, the fourth person seen by Nebuchadnezzar also appears, perhaps to represent the preincarnate Word, to follow a standard Christian interpretation. Similarly, the three Magi witnessing to the Christ child as the true God are juxtaposed to the three Hebrew youths repudiating Nebuchadnezzar's statue of the false god (see fig. 7.6). As discussed in chapter 3, God the Father occasionally shows up, sometimes with the other two members of the Holy Trinity, creating Adam and Eve (see fig. 3.4) or receiving the offerings of Cain and Abel (see fig. 3.5). However one interprets these individual

scenes or their combinations, it is evident that they did not invite viewers to direct prayers toward them. Instead, they function more didactically than devotionally, emphasizing God's role as a deity who delivers faithful believers from dangers, cures the sick, heals various bodily infirmities, and raises the dead.



FIGURE 4.4 Lid of an early Christian sarcophagus depicting Noah with the three Hebrew youths in the fiery furnace, Museo Pio Cristiano, Vatican, fourth century. (© Vanni Archive / Art Resource, NY.)

AVOIDING THE CULTIC GAZE

As described previously, the repertoire of early Christian pictorial art is limited chiefly to symbolic and narrative images and generally omits portrait depictions of Christ and the saints—that is, busts or full figures, seen from the front, intended to present the physical likeness of the model to the viewer.²⁶ Evidently, Christians of the second and third centuries consciously avoided nonnarrative,

portrait-type subjects. In fact, nonnarrative frontal images of Christ and the saints dating to prior to the mid-to-late fourth century are virtually nonexistent. This avoidance is striking, considering the broader cultural context in which Christian art emerged—a context in which representations of gods, heroes, benefactors, rulers, philosophers, and deceased family members were ubiquitous.²⁷ These objects enhanced the status or reputation of their models, revealed their character or power, or simply testified to their existence.

Portrait statues in particular were primary modes of representing divine or royal beings and manifesting their presence. These objects were found just about everywhere. According to Dio Cassius, the emperor Claudius resisted having more than one portrait of himself set up because all the public buildings in Rome were already stuffed with statues and votive offerings.²⁸ For Christians to resist making similar objects for their own cultic purposes was a testimony to the difference between pagan deities and their God.²⁹

Portraits have special functions and power. They serve to represent a being, whether mortal or divine, rather than illustrate a story or symbolize an idea. By presenting the model's face to the viewer's gaze, they engage the viewer in a distinct manner, making eye contact as it were and even seeming to look back at the viewer. This prompts the viewer to address them or to feel affection or fear, for instance, as if the images were actually the persons they

portrayed. Encountering a model's portrait face to face is entirely different than looking at a narrative image depicting a historical episode or mythological scene, as pleasing, inspiring, or edifying as that might be; the engagement with a portrait can be distinctly intimate and personal.

In antiquity, portraits were accorded a kind of proxy status. Imperial likenesses were set up in the ruler's absence to represent his implied presence. Images of the gods, which stood in sanctuaries, adorned public buildings, and graced elite private dwellings, could receive gifts, sacrifices, and prayers. Funerary portraits, set into family shrines, memorialized ancestors and were taken out on occasion to attend funeral processions and banquets. Sometimes portraits of disgraced individuals were desecrated, defaced, and even destroyed.^{[30](#)}

Christians may have avoided making holy portraits because they judged that these would have looked much like cult statues of pagan gods. And as cult statues were implicated in Christian persecution, they had particularly troubling associations. Trial records of martyred Christians often mention the role of portraits, both of the gods and of the emperor. For example, the acta of Saint Apollonius, who was martyred toward the end of the second century, report that the proconsul Perennis ordered him to offer sacrifice to the gods and to the image of Emperor Commodus. Apollonius refused, saying that he would not worship idols or bow to images made from stone, metal, or wood—images

of deities that cannot hear, see, or move on their own.^{[31](#)} The martyrdom account of Pionius, set sometime during the persecution of Decius, states that a certain Polemon, a temple caretaker, demanded that Pionius make a sacrifice to the gods of Rome and the emperor. He responded with a long speech about the dangers of idolatry and concluded with a pronouncement recalling the words of the three Hebrew youths (Dan 2:18): “We do not worship your so-called gods, nor will we adore the golden idol.”^{[32](#)} During the Great Persecution under Diocletian, the Roman soldier and martyr Dasius is reported to have refused to fulfill his obligation to offer sacrifice to Saturn, saying, “Seeing that you force me to such a despicable act, better is it for me to become a sacrifice to the Lord Christ by my own choice rather than immolate myself to your idol Saturn.”^{[33](#)}

Early Christians not only avoided making portraits of Christ and the saints but also appear to have been particularly wary of three-dimensional sculpture. This caution may have been prompted by the fact that pagan cult statues were the primary focus of their leaders’ condemnation of idols.^{[34](#)} As already discussed, most of the mockery and anti-idol vitriol found in early Christian texts specifically targets three-dimensional cult images that artisans carved, cast, and hammered in metal, stone, and wood.^{[35](#)} These divine effigies were most likely to receive veneration, in many forms: to be set up in shrines, dressed, crowned with garlands, bathed, anointed, processed through city streets, and even invited to dinner.^{[36](#)} A

nonportable two-dimensional painting of a narrative scene was not able to be treated in this way and so was unlikely to be an object of worship.

Despite this resistance to sculpture in the round, rare examples of early statues of Christ, the saints, and biblical characters have survived.^{[37](#)} A few relatively small ones can be dated to the third or early fourth century, among them some Good Shepherd figurines and a series of marble statuettes, now in the Cleveland Museum of Art, depicting Jonah swallowed by the sea monster, emerging from its mouth, reclining under his gourd vine, and standing in prayer (see fig. 4.5). Added to these are somewhat more ambiguous images, including a life-size enthroned depiction of the Roman schismatic bishop Hippolytus, now at the entrance to the Vatican Library, and a smaller seated figure that is usually identified as Christ, now in the Museo Nazionale Romano.^{[38](#)}



FIGURE 4.5 Small figurine of Jonah praying, ca. 280-90.
(Cleveland Museum of Art, John L. Severance Fund, accession

number 1965.240. Open access permission of the museum.)

A few documentary references to early Christian sculpture in the round come from works of Eusebius of Caesarea. In his *Life of Constantine*, probably written shortly after the emperor's death in 337, Eusebius asserts that Constantine set up public fountains with statues of Daniel and the Good Shepherd in Constantinople.^{[39](#)} In his *Church History* he provides an eyewitness account of a freestanding sculpture group in Paneas (also called Caesarea Philippi; modern Banias in the Golan Heights) that supposedly depicted Christ healing the hemorrhaging woman.^{[40](#)} According to Eusebius, who resided in the city, this bronze statue group stood on a tall stone base near the woman's home. The statue depicted her kneeling with her hands outstretched toward a standing man who was wearing a cloak and extending his hand to her. At the man's feet grew a plant that climbed up onto the hem of his robe and proved to be a remedy for all kinds of diseases.^{[41](#)} Thus, the biblical story had its continuation in the event's depiction, into which a plant with miraculous healing powers incorporated itself.

In his account, however, Eusebius sounds skeptical of the figures' identifications. He points out that the man only resembles Jesus, and therefore he presumes that the group was perceived (perhaps reidentified) as a memorial to Christ's miracle by converts who, not knowing better, continued in their old habit of honoring statues of those

whom they regarded as deliverers. Eusebius adds that he has learned that painted likeness of Peter, Paul, and Christ have also received veneration. Although Eusebius seems troubled by these objects, he trusts that they were revered by newly converted pagans who may not have known better and neither is surprised at their existence nor condemns them outright.

Eusebius gives the oldest surviving reference to these statues, but numerous later writers mention them, including the fifth-century historians Sozomen and Rufinus, the sixth-century chroniclers Gregory of Tours and John Malalas, and the unknown authors of the early eighth-century *Parastaseis syntomoi chronikai*.^{[42](#)} Sozomen embellished Eusebius's anecdote into a narrative of sacred image competition: The statue was erected by the healed woman herself but demolished by the emperor Julian in order to put up one of himself in its place. Then a cosmic intervention of fire from heaven dashed Julian's statue to the ground and left its broken pieces to rust. The image of Christ was dragged around the city and mutilated by the pagan populace before local Christians managed to rescue it and installed it in a church.^{[43](#)}

Another version, credited to the early fifth-century Arian historian Philostorgius but surviving only in a later epitome, gives even more details. In this telling, the group of the woman with Christ was originally set up by a fountain in the city center, along with some other statues, and a special herb grew up by the feet of Jesus's image and

was a remedy for various illnesses. Over time, these statues were neglected and gradually covered with dirt so that people forgot what they depicted. Eventually, the buried remains were unearthed, along with an identifying inscription, but the healing plant had long since disappeared. The townsfolk then moved the statue to the sacristy of a church—not so they could revere or adore it, for that would have been unlawful, but rather to show devotion to Christ, whom it depicted.⁴⁴ Thus, Philostorgius makes a point of claiming that the statue was not an object of idolatrous adoration but merely a votive gift and a prompt to pious regard by viewers. Whether situated in the city's public square or within a church, the statue had disappeared by the early Byzantine era.

Gregory of Nazianzus refers to lifelike freestanding statues in his church, donated by his father, the previous bishop. Presumably, these depicted saints, although his text does not make this clear.⁴⁵ A more elaborated account of early Christian statuary appears in the entry for the Roman bishop Sylvester (r. 314–35) in the *Liber Pontificalis*, an eighth-century compilation of papal biographies. According to this record, the emperor Constantine endowed the Lateran Basilica (or Basilica Constantiniana, as it was originally called) with a fastigium (or *fastidium*, as the text has it; a kind of screen or façade) displaying silver statues of Christ, the apostles, and spear-wielding angels. It adds that Constantine also bestowed nearly life-size figures of John the Baptist and Christ, along with a golden lamb on

the basilica's baptistery.⁴⁶ Because Constantine's subsequent donations to other monumental church structures seem to have excluded statuary in the round, perhaps these gifts were regarded as unsuitable.⁴⁷ Despite presumed episcopal approval of these reported sculptural donations, some modern historians have not hesitated to compare them to pagan cult objects.⁴⁸ Apparently, none of these objects has survived, perhaps being carried off during sacks of Rome beginning with the Visigothic invasion in 410.

While Eusebius did not condemn the statue group at Paneas or even Constantine's purported fountains with the Daniel and Good Shepherd sculptures, he nevertheless asserted that any statues that Constantine acquired for his new capital were pagan idols, brought there only to be mocked rather than in an attempt to beautify the city (which most historians assume to be the emperor's actual motivation):

In all these undertakings the Emperor worked for the glory of the Saviour's power. While he continued in this way to honour his Saviour God, he confuted the superstitious error of the heathen in all sorts of ways. . . . The sacred bronze figures, of which the error of the ancients had for a long time been proud, he displayed to all the public in all the squares of the Emperor's city, so that in one place the Pythian was displayed as a contemptible spectacle to the viewers, in another the Sminthian, in the Hippodrome itself the tripods from Delphi, and the Muses of Helicon at the palace. The city named after the Emperor was filled throughout with objects of skilled artwork in bronze dedicated in various provinces. To these under the name of gods those sick with error had for long ages vainly offered innumerable hecatombs and whole burnt sacrifices, but now they at last learnt sense, as

the Emperor used these very toys for the laughter and amusement of the spectators.^{[49](#)}

Eusebius goes on to relate how local officials were commanded to bring out their gods and subject them to mockery and contempt. Constantine ordered all idols to be collected: any one made of precious metal was melted down and the materials reused, while those of less value were given back to their owners as souvenirs of their shame. Whether Eusebius's tale has any historical merit is difficult to judge, given his clear intention to praise the emperor and deride those he describes as deluded victims of superstition.

THE EMERGENCE OF SACRED PORTRAITURE

Excluding ambiguous symbolic figures, third- and early fourth-century Christian iconography, whether in two-dimensional painting or relief sculpture, primarily displays characters and episodes from Bible stories. This almost exclusive preference for narrative imagery changed toward the end of the fourth century, when portrait-type renderings of Christ and the saints without specific background or narrative context and often with the helpful inclusion of a name for identification began to emerge.^{[50](#)} While surviving painted-panel icons of Christ and the saints cannot be dated earlier than the sixth century, a substantial number of mid-to-late-fourth-century likenesses of various saints and Christ have been found in the wall paintings of

catacombs, in relief sculpture on sarcophagi, and on small gold glasses. Among these are depictions of the Virgin Mary and Saint Agnes (see fig. 5.1) and multiple representations of Peter and Paul, often shown together (see fig. 4.6).



FIGURE 4.6 Bowl base with Saints Peter and Paul flanking a column with a Christogram, Rome, late fourth century, now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. (Accession number 16.174.3, Rogers Fund. Open access [public domain].)

The representations of these two apostles are remarkably consistent and easily distinguished. Paul normally has a high forehead, receding hairline, narrow face, and pointed beard. Peter, by contrast, typically has thick, curly hair, a lower forehead, a square jaw, and a trimmed beard. Reasons for these representations are uncertain: they could be based on some lost textual source or perhaps on generic philosophical types. Indeed, depictions of Saint Paul sometimes resemble portraits of the Neoplatonist Plotinus.⁵¹ Saint Peter tends to look like one of the soldier emperors, such as Diocletian or Maximian. The appearances of these apostles were perhaps intended to render them as a learned thinker and an active leader, respectively.

Setting aside the presumption that representations of the Good Shepherd were intended to be understood as Jesus, portrait likenesses of Christ also emerged in the late fourth century. Initially, these were not as consistent as those of Peter and Paul. While an early Christian floor mosaic in Britain's Roman villa at Hinton Saint Mary shows Christ as beardless, the bust portrait on the ceiling of the Catacomb of Commodilla may be one of the earliest to present him as fully bearded and with long, dark hair (see fig. 4.7).⁵² The variations continued well into the sixth century, as is evident, for example, in the Basilica of San Vitale in Ravenna, where a bearded portrait of Christ in the sanctuary arch's soffit mosaic contrasts with the enthroned and beardless Christ in the apse. Despite their differences,

all such compositions are intended to engage the spectator's gaze and prompt veneration. In the Roman Catacomb of Peter and Marcellinus, a relatively late instance of a catacomb painting, dated to the end of the fourth or early fifth century, a heavily bearded Christ, haloed and purple robed, sits enthroned between Peter and Paul (see fig. 4.8). Below (in the mural's lower register) are the four martyrs Marcellinus, Peter, Tiburtinus, and Gorgonius, identified by name. Directly beneath Christ, a lamb stands on the rock of paradise. Peter, Paul, and the four martyred saints gesture toward Christ as if beckoning the viewer to offer him their prayers.



FIGURE 4.7 Bust of Christ from the ceiling of a hypogeum in the Roman Catacomb of Commodilla, late fourth century. (Photo: AKG-Images / André Held.)



FIGURE 4.8 Christ with Peter, Paul, and four martyrs, Catacomb of Peter and Marcellinus, Rome, fourth century. (Photo: ©DeA Picture Library / Art Resource, NY.)

Some historians have argued that prior to the eighth century, any portraits of Christ or the saints were merely commemorative images or votive offerings rather than objects of veneration and that no evidence supports a Christian cult of images earlier than the seventh century.⁵³ This argument is partly based on the lack of recorded miracles attributed to icons or beliefs in their intercessory powers in the preiconoclastic period. This leads to the judgment that Christians did not perceive any direct links between the image and the model—that is, they did not have a theology of the image that understood a saint's portrait as not just a likeness but actually a vehicle for directing prayers or offerings to the one it portrays.⁵⁴ Yet the evolution, beginning in the late fourth or early fifth century, away from dominantly narrative images to more frontal, nonnarrative portraits of the saints and Christ, especially but not exclusively in church apses, suggests that viewers were also developing new ways of engaging figurative artworks, which would have included regarding them as focal points of both communal and private prayer.

CONCLUSION

Contrary to older theories, Christians did not fall into idolatry by beginning to make and use visual art in the early third century. They likely owned artifacts with pictorial imagery from the first, and church authorities were unconcerned about this. Idolatry pertained to images

of pagan deities, especially those that played a part in traditional religious rituals. The distinctively Christian art that emerged was, by contrast, both symbolic and narrative. It did not prompt devotional prayer or veneration but served to identify the owner's religious affiliation or sentiments and to portray certain Bible stories with a didactic or even hermeneutical function. The iconography shows Jesus as an actor in a scene rather than a cult image to be worshiped. This might have allowed Christians to believe they were avoiding idolatry. A telling analysis comes from Ernst Kitzinger, who long ago pointed to the role that cult statues played in Greco-Roman religious practice. In comparison, he described early Christian symbolic figures and narrative iconography as "relatively harmless."⁵⁵ For the most part, Christians also initially avoided sculpture in the round, which of all art might have seemed most like the statues of the pagan gods that were set up as objects for devotees to venerate. Thus, the compelling question is not why Christians began to make pictorial art when they did but why that art changed from primarily depictions of narrative episodes to images similar to those that early apologists had reviled. The placement of holy portraits in saints' shrines, in churches, and even on home altars certainly indicates that these were objects of some type of cultic behavior, if not necessarily one that was widely practiced or approved by church authorities.

The next chapter will show that certain church authorities did express their concerns about the pious

attentions such images appear to have received from members of their flocks. However, some fifth- and sixth-century writings from other church authorities indicate approval of pictorial depictions of saints, biblical heroes, and Christ and even suggest guarded approval—if not yet a fully developed defense—of their veneration. At the very least, the critiques now aimed at Christian rather than pagan images, along with the strategies that tried to cast them as essentially benign, reveal that they had begun to play a new role in Christian devotional practice.

OceanofPDF.com

5

HOLY PORTRAITS

Controversies and Commendation

Indeed, although silent on the wall, a painting can speak and be most useful.

GREGORY OF NYSSA, *IN PRAISE OF THEODORE*

For what a spoken narrative presents through hearing, this silent painting shows through imitation.

BASIL OF CAESAREA, *HOMILY 19*

Surviving documentary evidence attests that from the second century CE onward, certain church authorities observed devotional practices among Christians that, in their judgment, approximated idolatrous or heretical adoration of holy images. This concern grew more pronounced in the fourth and fifth centuries, even while many apparently tolerated narrative iconographic

programs in cemeteries and churches. It was, after all, in the fourth century that portrait-type depictions of Christ, his mother Mary, and the saints gradually appeared and began to replace the older narrative subjects. These new types were installed in mosaic on church apses, woven into curtains, painted on tomb walls, and rendered on portable wooden panels. With only a few exceptions, they were not three-dimensional figures and in this respect in particular contrasted with traditional Greco-Roman cult statues.

Christian scruples about avoiding images that might bear troubling similarities to pagan idols may explain why so few examples of early Christian portraits or three-dimensional statues have been found. This lack of evidence might not be conclusive by itself, especially in light of some texts that suggest that icons or statues of Christ or of Christian saints might have existed prior to the late fourth or early fifth century and that in some cases, as in Eusebius's discussion of the statue at Paneas (see chapter 4), do not always describe them as problematic. Yet an overview of the textual record shows that the production of Christian portraits, whether of divine beings or historical holy persons, raised concerns that in many instances paralleled the issues identified with pagan cult images. Critics argued the traditional, Platonic point that images merely record fleeting external appearances, or even invented ones, and as such are untrustworthy. They pretend to be representations of reality but are actually false and are thus unworthy subjects of veneration. This problem is

particularly acute with respect to portraits of Christ, who as a divine being perhaps should not be depicted, or at least not in his divine nature.

At the same time, other textual witnesses began to describe these portraits in more positive terms, as aids to Christian piety and both edifying and inspirational. These divergent views had corresponding assessments of the emerging cult of relics, which itself indicated the increasing appreciation of the roles of sensible objects in Christian religious practices.¹

CHRISTIAN PORTRAITS LIKENED TO PAGAN IDOLS

One of the earliest recorded testimonies to a Christian portrait is found in the case of a recently converted Christian who adapted his former practice of image veneration to his new faith. The story comes from the apocryphal *Acts of John*, a fragmentary document that scholars have pieced together and usually date to the second or third century.² The relevant portion of this text recounts the actions of a certain Lycomedes, a praetor of the Ephesians, whom John miraculously healed. To express his gratitude, Lycomedes commissioned a portrait of that apostle, to be made without his awareness. Once it was finished, he placed John's image on an altar in his bedroom so that he could venerate it in private, putting lit lamps before it and draping garlands upon it. Hence, he treated it in much the same way as he would have an icon of Apollo.

When John asked why Lycomedes prayed apart from the rest of the community, Lycomedes showed him the portrait. Initially, John did not realize that he was the one it portrayed, for he had never seen his own face, and asked whether it was an image of one of the gods. Essentially, he accused Lycomedes of still behaving like a pagan. Lycomedes explained that the portrait was, in fact, of John himself, and that while he worshiped only God, he regarded John as next to God, insofar as John had raised him from death. That was why he crowned and revered John's image.

John immediately reproached Lycomedes, not correcting his mistaken theology but rather scolding him for having obtained the portrait at all and asserting that it was not accurate. After being offered a mirror so that he could better judge whether it resembled him, John insisted that even though the image might reflect his external appearance, it was not a true likeness. The painting showed only what was visible to the eye; it did not depict his soul or character. External likenesses, John explained, are immature and imperfect, records of transitory and superficial appearances: merely dead representations of the dead.^{[3](#)}

Irenaeus of Lyon mentions the case of another early Christian sacred portrait. In his late second-century treatise *Against Heresies*, he refers to Marcellina, a certain woman student of the gnostic teacher Carpocrates. She came to Rome and, in his view, led many astray. Among

Marcellina's various transgressions was the alleged possession of a likeness of Jesus made from life, which, Irenaeus's informant claimed, was produced (or perhaps commissioned) by Pontius Pilate. According to the report, Marcellina displayed this object in a portrait gallery, along with images of Pythagoras, Plato, and Aristotle, where it received offerings consistent with those that pagans customarily gave their cult images, including the bestowal of a crown.⁴

A similar account occurs a bit later in a comment attributed to the late second- or early third-century Roman teacher Hippolytus. Without mentioning Marcellina, Hippolytus repeats that followers of Carpocrates, who called themselves gnostics, possessed figures of Christ fashioned by Pilate, some of them paintings (εἰκόνας).⁵ Yet another version of this story found its way into the work of the heresiologist Epiphanius of Salamis (315–403), who reiterated the allegation that Carpocratians had images of Jesus made by Pilate from precious materials and that they venerated them, after the manner of “heathens,” alongside portraits of Pythagoras, Plato, and Aristotle.⁶ Modern readers might find it hard to believe that Pontius Pilate held up Christ's trial to make or commission such an object. Yet as late as the sixth century, a Jerusalem pilgrim from Piacenza described seeing a portrait of Christ that was said to be made from life and set up in a basilica on the site of Pilate's praetorium.⁷

These accounts of representations of Christ resonate with a problematic but nevertheless interesting report in the *Historia Augusta*, which states that the private lararium (a shrine for domestic deities) of the emperor Severus Alexander (208–35) was furnished not only with portraits of his ancestors but also with statues of gods, heroes, and philosophers, including Orpheus, Alexander the Great, Plato, Cicero, the biblical patriarch Abraham, and Jesus Christ.⁸ Elsewhere this document portrays the emperor as sympathetic to Christianity and as having wanted to build a temple to Christ to give him a place among the gods.⁹ Although scholars dispute the date, authorship, and reliability of this story's source (some even proposing that it includes later Christian interpolations), many regard it as nonetheless containing some relevant information.¹⁰ The tale's very survival demonstrates that the author's contemporary audience was willing to believe that an imperial collection of gods' and heroes' portraits could include images of Jesus and Abraham.¹¹ From another perspective, the story suggests a lack of clear boundaries between pagans and Christians—if not actually at the time of Severus Alexander, then at least in the retrospective view of fourth-century readers.¹²

The references to a Lycomedes's portrait of John in the *Acts of John*, the story of Carpocratians owning statues of Jesus, and the admittedly controversial excerpts from the *Historia Augusta* suggest that some—perhaps marginal—groups of early Christians possessed portraits of saints or

even statues of Christ. Moreover, according to these sources, these objects not only were obtained and displayed but were evidently the center of ritual prayer and veneration, revered in the manner that polytheists honored their cult images. While such documents refer to the existence of at least some early portraits of Christian holy figures, for the most part they associate them with heretical sects or syncretistic polytheists as well as idolatrous behaviors.

FOURTH-CENTURY CRITIQUE

Although the earliest holy portraits primarily may not have been the foci of devotion or prayer, documentary evidence suggests that Christian authorities often objected to them on these grounds. Apparently, some of the faithful ascribed special sanctity to certain images or treated them in ways that prompted cautionary actions. Whereas Eusebius mentioned portraits of Peter, Paul, and Christ and the statue of the hemorrhaging woman at Paneas without negative comment, other writers reflected significant anxiety about the popular treatment of these kinds of images.^{[13](#)}

One often noted witness to the likelihood that Christians owned and even venerated portraits of holy persons by the fourth century comes from the compiled acts of the Council of Elvira, usually dated to 300-306.^{[14](#)} This Spanish regional council dealt with a number of church disciplinary

issues, including a concern about images, addressed by canon 36. This brief canon simply states: “There shall be no pictures in churches, lest what is revered and adored be depicted on walls.”¹⁵ The wording implies not wariness about art in general and much less about narrative subjects but rather caution about depicting certain types of figures (i.e., sacred things worthy of adoration) on church walls.¹⁶ The kinds of artworks that would have attracted the reverence to which the canon refers were most likely frontal portraits of Christ, the apostles, and other saints. Presumably, at least some Christians must have been prone to venerating or praying to them, or there would have been no need for such a ruling. While this might not be direct and early evidence for a cult of icons as such, concern about such behavior suggests something similar.

A second commonly cited fourth-century criticism of images comes from another source attributed to Eusebius of Caesarea, a letter in which he replies to a request from the emperor Constantine’s sister Constantia. She evidently asked him to provide a portrait of Christ that she could use for her personal devotions. Although Eusebius seems fairly tolerant of image veneration in his account of the statue of Jesus with the hemorrhaging woman (explaining that Gentile converts could be expected to continue with some of their old practices), this letter expounds a far more negative line, particularly in regard to images of Christ. Refusing Constantia’s appeal, Eusebius explains that what she wants is impossible.

Part of his concern was most likely the fact that images of Jesus are categorically different from images of saints or biblical characters, insofar as Jesus is divine. Showing almost prescient cognizance of the complex arguments that would be deployed in Christological debates of the fifth century, Eusebius framed the problem somewhat like the Apostle John did in his rebuke of Lycomedes. Portraying only Christ's external appearance heretically divides his inseparable human and divine natures. Because no artist could represent Christ's invisible, uncircumscribable divine nature, the portrait would be no more than an inanimate imitation of the temporally conditioned form he assumed in his incarnation:

What sort of image of Christ are you seeking? Is it the true and unalterable one which bears His essential characteristics, or the one which He took up for our sake when He assumed the form of a servant? [Phil 2:7]. . . . Granted, He has two forms, even I do not think that your request has to do with His divine form. . . . Surely then, you are seeking His image as a servant, that of the flesh which He put on for our sake. But that, too, we have been taught, was mingled with the glory of His divinity so that the mortal part was swallowed up by Life [2 Cor 5:4]. . . . How can one paint an image of so wondrous and unattainable a form—if the term 'form' is at all applicable to the divine and spiritual essence—unless, like the unbelieving pagans, one is to represent things that bear no possible resemblance to anything . . .? For they, too, make such idols when they wish to mould the likeness of what they consider to be a god or, as they might say, one of the heroes or anything else of the kind, yet are unable even to approach a resemblance, and so delineate and represent some strange human shapes. Surely, even you will agree that such practices are not lawful for us.^{[17](#)}

Toward the end of his letter, Eusebius adds an interesting detail that echoes one of his passing comments in the story of the statue at Paneas: that a woman once presented him with a picture of two men in the guise of philosophers and alleged that they were depictions of Paul and Christ. Declaring that he had no idea where she obtained the picture or why she mistakenly believed that it represented the apostle and the Savior, he reports that he confiscated the offensive object, as he worried that her displaying it would make others regard her as an idol worshipper.

Unfortunately, because this letter survives only among the testimonies assembled four centuries later during the eighth-century iconoclastic controversy, its authenticity is uncertain.¹⁸ Another major problem is its anticipation of points debated a century or more after it was purportedly written (e.g., the union or distinction of Christ's two natures). Scholars have argued both for and against its being genuine; the majority accept that it is.¹⁹ It might have been providentially discovered by eighth-century iconoclasts and then modified to strengthen their case. If it is genuine (or even partly so) and taken together with his mention of the statue group at Paneas, then Eusebius seems to have been aware that portraits of Christ and the apostles not only existed but had become objects of devotional use and actual veneration.

Epiphanius, the bishop of Salamis who expressed concern about alleged images of Christ that he described as idolatrously made and venerated by Carpocratians

(discussed above), is also said to have written five works that report his furiously destroying portraits of Christ and the saints. Among them are the final section (a *post-scriptum*) of a letter from Epiphanius to John of Jerusalem that is commonly dated to 393 and has survived as *Epistle 51* in Jerome's collected letters (Jerome apparently having translated it into Latin around 394). Another goes by the long title *A Treatise against Those Who, Following an Idolatrous Practice, Make Images with the Intention of Reproducing the Likeness of Christ, the Mother of God, the Angels, and the Prophets*. Others include a *Letter to the Emperor Theodosius* and Epiphanius's *Will* (arguably dated to 403, just before his death), with either an independent or an attached *Dogmatic Letter*.^{[20](#)}

As with Eusebius's *Letter to Constantia*, doubts exist about the authenticity of these works. The history of scholarly argument is too lengthy and complicated to summarize here, but in short, the consensus tends toward acceptance of some or all of them. In many instances, these works are simply taken for granted and briefly cited as evidence of early iconophobia.^{[21](#)} By contrast, two early defenders of sacred icons, John of Damascus in the mid-eighth century and Theodore the Studite in the early ninth, both insisted that they all are forgeries, an allegation that also appears in the acts of the Second Council of Nicaea (787).^{[22](#)} A section of the patriarch Nicephorus's *Antirrhetica adversus Epiphanidem*, written around 818–20, likewise makes this claim, while quoting and

strenuously refuting the works attributed to Epiphanius (along with the Eusebian letter).²³ Moreover, like the purported Eusebian *Letter to Constantia*, these works have some apparent anachronisms and echo arguments made by eighth-century iconoclasts (among them the insistence that the incarnation does not justify making portraits of Christ).²⁴

In brief, these fragments express Epiphanius's alleged opinion that no early church authorities would have permitted portraits of Christ, biblical figures, or saints in their houses of worship. Apparently distinguishing depictions of Christ as a divine being from those showing saints who were merely holy humans, these writings focus on the issue of historical accuracy, with an insistence that artists "lie by representing the appearance of saints in different forms according to their whim, sometimes delineating the persons as old men, sometimes as youths, [and so] intruding into things which they have not seen."²⁵ The *Treatise* attributed to Epiphanius disparages depictions of Peter, Paul, and John made in colors on the plaster walls of private homes as abominations similar to pagan idols. The author dismisses the explanation that such paintings were meant to honor and remind viewers of the apostles, saying that they were merely false inventions of painters, who followed their own whims and represented the glorious apostles as if they were merely ordinary men.²⁶

The excerpt from a letter that Epiphanius supposedly wrote to the bishop of Jerusalem, which appears as a postscript to Jerome's *Epistle 51*, might be more credible than the other four documents. According to the explanatory preface, Jerome translated portions of Epiphanius's letter into Latin but intended it only for a guest staying in his Jerusalem monastery. Rather than remain private, however, it was passed along. In this letter, Epiphanius recalls how, on his way from Jerusalem to Bethel, he came to the village of Anautha and found a church with a curtain painted with the image of Christ or one of the saints. He pronounced this a defiling idol and, in his fury, tore it down and suggested it be used as a pauper's shroud. The upset congregation asked him to replace the curtain, and he apparently agreed, but only after finding an acceptable substitute.^{[27](#)} Problematically, as mentioned above, the authenticity of this letter has also been questioned, partly because the Greek text exists only in the patriarch Nicephorus's writings against the Iconoclastic Council of 815 and partly because the excerpt included in Jerome's letter seems to be a poor translation of a Greek original, possibly a Carolingian scribe's contribution to the Western repudiation of the Second Council of Nicaea's defense of holy icons.^{[28](#)}

A similar epistle, alleged to be from Epiphanius to the emperor Theodosius, flatly denies that any ancient Christian teacher could have allowed an image of Christ or any of the saints or biblical characters to be displayed in

either a church or a private house. The author then complains that he has often but without success urged his fellow clergy to remove such images. He entreats the emperor to act, ordering the whitewashing of paintings on walls and removal of any curtains bearing holy portraits, which, he again suggests, could be given to the poor as burial shrouds. Here Epiphanius complains that artists misrepresent Christ as a Nazarene with long hair. He also alleges that painters have invented the images of the saints entirely from their own imaginations: “These impostors represent the holy apostle Peter as an old man with hair and beard cut short; some represent St. Paul as a man with receding hair, others as being bald and bearded, and the other apostles as being closely cropped.”²⁹ This description matches the depictions of the two founding apostles in fourth- and fifth-century iconography (see figs. 4.6 and 5.5). Epiphanius concludes this letter by asserting that the single “salutary sign” of Christ (i.e., the empty cross) should suffice for doors and everywhere else.

The disputed authenticity and complicated textual history of these works make it difficult to assess their reliability as testimonies to early attitudes toward holy portraits. The most persuasive argument against them—that they are known primarily from documents collected by opponents of images during the later Byzantine iconoclastic debates—is not necessarily conclusive. Perhaps the safest approach is to treat them with caution, recognizing that some (if not all) may not represent their purported author’s

views or even reflect the time and circumstances in which they are said to have been written. Yet even if these works do not constitute undisputed proof of early veneration of holy portraits, a number of positive assessments from the fourth century and a group of documents from the fifth and early sixth offer more trustworthy evidence for the practice.

FOURTH-CENTURY APPROBATION

Although representing human saints seems to have raised some problems, they might have seemed less troubling than those posed by depictions of the divine-human Christ. Perhaps for this reason, production of saints' portraits as a means of honoring them appears to have become a common practice in the late fourth century. For example, John Chrysostom commended those who commissioned images of Saint Meletius (d. 381), the bishop of Antioch under whom he had served as deacon. John observed that many of Meletius's flock had given his name to their children and thus honored the man, garnered sacred protection for their homes, and received condolence for their loss of so great a patron. He explained, "And what you did with the names you also did the same with his image: for many people inscribed that hallowed image on ring-heads, on stamps, on plates, on the walls of rooms, and everywhere, so that it was not only possible to hear that holy name, but also to see everywhere the figure of his body, and have a double means of consolation for his

absence.”³⁰ Seeing the saint’s likeness on their signet rings, bedroom walls, drinking cups, and other objects, these pious followers would be inspired by his example of holiness and comforted in their grief over his loss. Here also, the significance of names is apparent. Names are a kind of image in themselves, and they were regularly added to saints’ portraits to help identify them (see fig. 5.1).



FIGURE 5.1 Saint Agnes (named) on gold glass, from the Catacomb of Panfilo, Rome. (Photo: Scala / Art Resource, NY.)

While John asserted that images of Meletius consoled those who grieved their lost shepherd, according to Gregory of Nyssa's eulogy for the bishop, given five years earlier (at the time of Meletius's death), the production of saints' portraits has an additional purpose. Gregory assured his audience that as a saint, Meletius had the power to intercede with Christ for them from his place in heaven and that gazing at his portrait would help viewers sense his presence as they prayed to him for aid.^{[31](#)} Both of these witnesses evidently believed that the saint's portrait had spiritual and devotional functions.

Other fourth-century documents graphically describe pictorial portrayals of the bravery and suffering of Christian martyrs. Many of them mention narrative art and not portraits as such. While these ekphrases seemingly refer to existing paintings, their aim is not primarily expositive. Rather, their intention is to prompt vivid images in their readers' (or hearers') imaginations, possibly in lieu of the viewing of actual artworks. For example, Gregory of Nyssa explicitly praised the painter who colorfully depicted the heroic deeds and terrible sufferings of Saint Theodore in the saint's shrine at Euchaita (near Amaseia in Pontus). Along with the saint himself, Gregory described images of his tormentors, the spectators, and—above all—Christ, the one who judged the contest. Thus, the artists' handiwork, Gregory said, was the equivalent of a book that told its tale from the walls instead of from pages.^{[32](#)}

In a sermon attributed to Gregory's friend and contemporary Basil of Caesarea, ostensibly delivered at the martyrdom of Saint Barlaam in Antioch, the preacher appealed to his listeners' imaginations, prompting them to contemplate the saint's suffering as he let his hand be burned rather than drop sacrificial incense on the fire kindled before a pagan cult statue. Basil also praised the work of painters, who are able to make the scene far more vivid to spectators than the preacher can to his audience:

Arise now, brilliant painters of heroic achievements! Glorify by your art the mutilated image [*eikôn*] of the general [Barlaam]! Brighten by the colours of your skill this victor who has been described in less bright tones by me! Let me depart defeated by you in outlining the triumphs of the martyr! I am glad to be defeated by such a victory of your might today! Let me see the struggle against the fire being depicted by you with greater precision! Let me see the combatant being depicted even more joyful on your image! Let the demons weep also now, being afflicted by the feats of the martyr in your work! Let once again the burning hand be shown defeating them! And let also Christ, the master of the fighting contest, be depicted on the panel!^{[33](#)}

Christ is again described in this passage as present in the image, here also as the judge of or presider over the contest. In sermon more certainly attributed to Basil and delivered in his cathedral church, which housed the relics of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste, the bishop similarly claimed that silent images function like spoken texts, making dead heroes of the faith present to believers and thus exciting their courage and commitment. In this homily Basil compares words to images but also points out their differences by explaining that his oration will "show to all,

as if in a picture, the prowess of these men. For the brave deeds of war often supply subjects for both speech writers and painters. Speech writers embellish them with their words, painters depict them on their panels. . . . For what spoken narrative presents through hearing, this silent painting shows through imitation.”³⁴

Another instance of a sermon that refers to a painting of a martyr’s trials comes from Asterius of Amasea (d. 410), who apparently was enthralled by seeing an artist’s depiction of Saint Euphemia on a canvas hanging when he made a visit to her tomb in Chalcedon. With rhetorical flair, Asterius delineated a full-scale history painting with a huge cast of characters (soldiers, torturers, magistrate, and spectators, along with the saint herself). He praised the artist for capturing Euphemia’s facial expressions, which conveyed her modesty, courage, and piety, and compared the work to a famous first-century BCE painting of Medea, adding that he had come to vastly prefer depictions of Christian stories to episodes from classical literature. Asterius then discussed how the image affected him. He recounted how the sight of the saint’s torture moved him to tears and asserted that it made him so sad that he had to stop writing. Finally, he invited his listeners to go see the work for themselves, to judge whether he had described it well enough.³⁵

Perhaps the most prolific and elaborate writer of these types of ekphrastic expositions was the Spanish poet Prudentius (348–413). In his cycle of verses known as the

Peristephanon (Crowns), Prudentius narrates the gruesome deaths of fourteen martyrs, including Peter, Paul, Lawrence, Cyprian, and a number of Spanish saints. While these compositions focus on the passions of these figures, they also describe the interior decorations of the saints' martyria, which, if reliable, would make them precious surviving testimony to much lost narrative mural painting. For example, in one poem the author presents himself as a pilgrim en route to Rome, stopping at the shrine of Saint Cassian of Imola, which was near Ravenna. As he draws near to the martyr's tomb, he notices the saint's portrait, showing the injuries he had received as a teacher at the hands of wicked students wielding styluses: "He bore a thousand wounds, his parts all torn and nicked. / It showed his skin with small stabs, punched and pricked."³⁶

In another of his poems, dedicated to the Roman martyr Hippolytus, Prudentius describes an elaborate image of the saint being dragged and dismembered by wild horses as his faithful devotees follow, gathering his torn flesh in the folds of their garments and retrieving drops of blood from the dust with sponges.³⁷ In his hymn to Saint Eulalia, Prudentius addresses the evils of idols, as this martyr's death was prompted by her trampling on cult images and denouncing pagan gods as worthless. He even refers to the emperor as a devotee of stones.³⁸ A still more scathing attack on pagan idolatry comes up in Prudentius's tenth poem, on the martyr Romanus of Antioch, in which the saint describes cult images as having been carved from

mere blocks wood or fabricated from used cooking utensils and curses the artists who made images that were seductively beautiful.^{[39](#)} Here Prudentius allows his saint to indulge in a brief diatribe on how the images of the pagan gods are deceptive: “But, you say, the graven image in bronze is a thing of beauty. What curse shall I call down on the studios of Greece, which have created gods for foolish nations? . . . Art has been effective in propagating superstitions.”^{[40](#)}

Although these texts prompt vivid pictures in the reader’s imagination, without further documentary or archeological evidence it is difficult to suppose that much such art existed, at least in the way they are explicated in these kinds of literary works. Surviving early Christian narrative art rarely shows fully developed historical scenes with sequential and elaborated iconography like that in Prudentius’s poems.^{[41](#)} By contrast, contemporary Roman art included historical paintings (of, e.g., battles and festivals) and mythological cycles painted on walls or rendered in relief sculpture, which, together with the literary tradition of ekphrasis, might have given Prudentius a basis from which to craft his poetic constructions.^{[42](#)} Scenes such as those found on Trajan’s Column employ a linear type of narrative on a scale that Christian iconography developed only much later. By contrast, most early Christian narrative art shows a single episode, which stands as a reference to one story and is only very rarely joined with others into a cycle.^{[43](#)}

Prudentius may have been inspired by existing imagery and expanded upon what he saw to stimulate a more intense response in his readers or listeners. Perhaps he also wanted them to see more than was actually in the artwork, thereby facilitating an enhanced mental epiphany.⁴⁴ By fusing narrative story and described image into a single aesthetic experience, Prudentius created a multidimensional rhetorical feedback loop: the story inspired images in the mind, and those images heightened the listener's encounter with the saint in the very place where his or her relics were enshrined. In this sense, Prudentius took on the role of an artist himself, painting pictures in words that could exist in the mind's eye or imagination, if not necessarily in the external world.⁴⁵ The process of vivifying the image with the story (and vice versa) makes the saint almost visually present, at least in the imaginations of devotees.

Considering the extensive details that Gregory of Nyssa, Basil of Caesarea, and Asterius of Amasea lavished on their sermonic or poetic ekphrases, one may ask if the martyrdom scenes that they describe actually existed—if not in the saints' shrines, then perhaps elsewhere. Christians often emulated familiar forms from classical art, and these fit that pattern.⁴⁶ Even Augustine, who was generally ambivalent about visual art, referred to a "lovely painting" (*dulcissima pictura*) of Stephen's stoning when he preached at that saint's shrine in Hippo. He used the image as a visual aid, pointing out Saul standing at the back of the

crowd, holding the cloaks of those who were casting the stones.^{[47](#)} Yet despite these vivid verbal treatments, nothing quite like such scenes has survived in Christian iconography. Even similar instances are rare: sarcophagus reliefs that portray the arrests and threatened executions of Peter and Paul (see fig. 5.2), a wall painting in a small confessio (possibly a saints' shrine) beneath Rome's Basilica of Giovanni and Paolo that appears to show martyrs bound and executed (see fig. 5.3), and the columns supporting the ciborium in the subterranean basilica of Saints Nereus and Achilleus in the Catacomb of Domitilla that depict the beheading of those two martyrs.^{[48](#)} None of these, however, resembles the complex narrative scenes found in the ekphrastic texts. In fact, the dearth of violent imagery is consistent with the lack of visual portrayals of Christ's crucifixion prior to the sixth century.^{[49](#)}



FIGURE 5.2 Saint Paul being led to martyrdom, detail of the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus, Museum of the Treasury, Saint Peter's Basilica, Vatican, mid-fourth century. (Photo: Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY.)



FIGURE 5.3 Scene of martyrdom, shrine and domestic area beneath the Basilica of Giovanni and Paolo, Rome, fourth century. (Photo by the author.)

Even if martyrs' shrines lacked complex narrative artworks, however, it seems likely that they had at least a portrait of the honored saint, such as the fourth-century mosaic one in Milan's martyrium of Saint Victor. This depicts the saint against a gold background and is almost certainly directly above where his relics were interred (see fig. 5.4). His left hand holds a book inscribed with his name and his right grasps a type of tau-rho, or monogrammatic

cross, bearing the word PANECIRIAE. On the viewer's right, another type of cross, with two large loops circling a short cross bar, bears the legend FAUSTINI. These inscriptions are probably the donors' names and represent their intention that the saint might intercede for them because they had commissioned and set up his portrait.[50](#)



FIGURE 5.4 Mosaic of Saint Victor, Chapel of San Vittore in Ciel d'Oro, Milan, late fourth century. (Photo: Ivan Vdovin / Alamy Stock Photo.)

FIFTH- AND SIXTH-CENTURY ACCEPTANCE AND APPLICATION

The diminishing textual critiques and increasing numbers of portraits of both Christ and the saints indicate that these

types of images gradually became less controversial and more prevalent. This is particularly evident in Ravenna's mosaic programs, where saints' visages often occupy roundels flanking a similar image of Christ (see fig. 5.5). Yet such things might still have raised concerns among church authorities. For example, Augustine specifically warned members of his flock against the veneration of both tombs and pictures—probably saints' martyria augmented with their portraits.⁵¹ In one of his sermons, he also expressed regret that some pagans had accused Christians of adoring columns (or perhaps images set upon columns) in the church as if they were sacred objects.⁵²

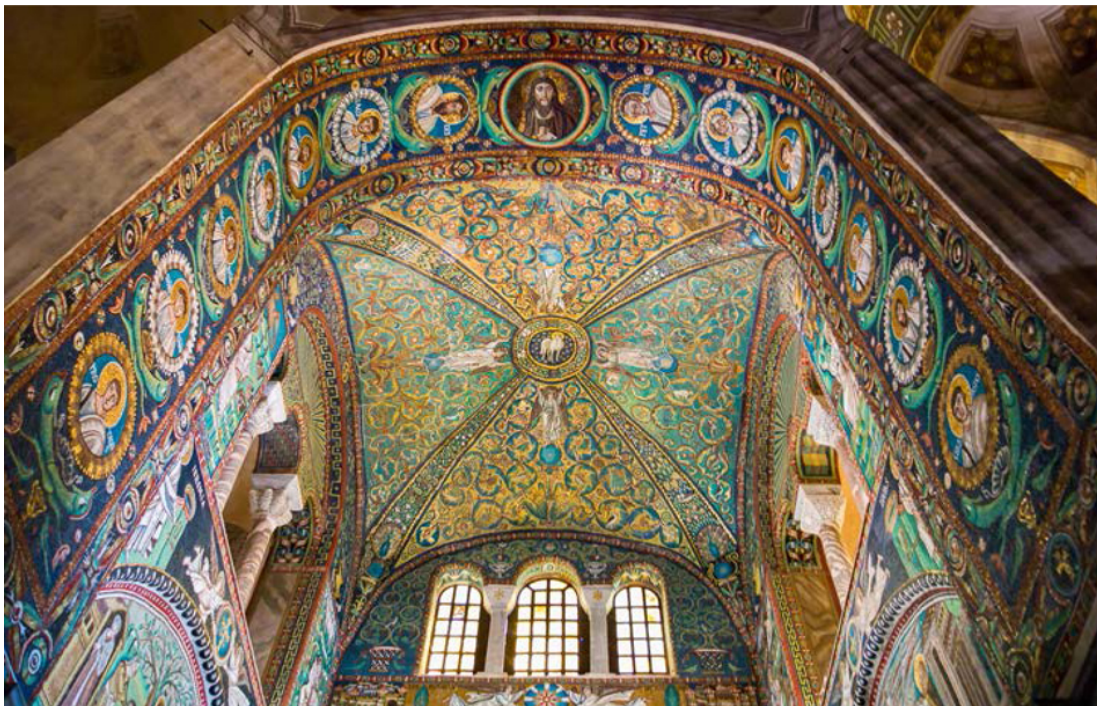


FIGURE 5.5 Mosaic portraits of Christ and his apostles (Paul and Peter immediately to the left and right, respectively), inside

sanctuary arch, Basilica of San Vitale, Ravenna, ca. 547. (Photo: Realy Easy Star / Giuseppe Masci / Alamy Stock Photo.)

In at least two other places, Augustine refers to specific saints' images, not to condemn misguided veneration but to comment on the mistake of assuming that any portrait can bear a true likeness. As Saint John told Lycomedes, all portraits are deceptive, but icons of the saints and of Christ are especially so. One of these instances comes up in Augustine's book *The Harmony of the Gospels*, where he remarks that people have fallen into error because they seek Christ and his apostles on painted walls instead of in the holy scriptures. They also mistakenly assume, having seen depictions in many places of Christ with both Peter and Paul, that Paul, like Peter, was one of Christ's apostles while Christ was still alive.⁵³ Augustine's reference here may be to a composition that became widely popular in the mid-fourth century, which shows Peter and Paul receiving the Law from the hand of Christ (see figs. 4.3 and 6.2).⁵⁴

In his treatise *On the Trinity*, Augustine recalls portraits of Christ and, like Eusebius and Epiphanius, raises the problem of accuracy. How, he wonders, could an artist fashion a true image of Jesus, the Virgin Mary, or an apostle without having the living model before him, and what accounts for their many different representations? Here he muses on the limits of the human imagination but, unlike Eusebius in the *Letter to Constantia*, seems unworried about depicting Christ in his two natures. Rather, he insists

that Christ as an incarnate human certainly had a human face, even if no one can know for sure which depiction most resembles him, as the Gospels offer no verifying description. In conclusion, he expresses skepticism that any single portrait of Christ, the apostles, or the Virgin could approach the truth but says this really has no bearing on whether or how one can be saved:

Anyone, surely, who has read or heard what the apostle Paul wrote or what was written about him, will fabricate a face for the apostle in his imagination, and for everybody else whose name is mentioned in these texts. And every one of the vast number of people to whom these writings are known will think of their physical features and lineaments in a different way, and it will be quite impossible to tell whose thoughts are nearest the mark in this respect. . . . Even the physical face of the Lord is pictured with infinite variety by countless imaginations, though whatever it was like he certainly had only one. Nor as regards the faith we have in the Lord Jesus Christ is it in the least relevant to salvation what our imaginations picture him like, which is probably quite different from the reality. What does matter is that we think of him specifically as a man; for we have embedded in us as it were a standard notion of the nature of man. . . . Nor do we know what the virgin Mary looked like, from whom he was marvelously born. . . . And so without prejudice to faith it is permissible to say "Perhaps she had a face like this, perhaps she did not."⁵⁵

In this passage, Augustine's comments indicate that the visual depictions of Christ, Peter, and Paul of which he was aware varied widely.

The problem of narrative art's inability to fully and unambiguously represent a story and the danger of holy portraits' prompting inappropriate adoration appear again in the works of Paulinus of Nola. Besides seeking visual

representations of the Trinity for his apses at Nola and Fundi, described in chapter 2, Paulinus evidently commissioned artists to embellish his cathedral church with sacred pictures and holy portraits. He plainly denied that such images were sacred in themselves, referring to them as “empty figures” (*vacuae figurae*). Yet he also regarded them as not absolutely empty insofar as they were edifying. They nurtured faith and drew the attention of visitors away from feasting and drinking at martyrs’ tombs. Gazing on scenes from the Bible increased comprehension, and contemplating depictions of saints developed virtues and deepened piety. Paulinus explained that the pictures were accompanied by captions that identified their subject matter, lest viewers be unable to identify and appreciate them.^{[56](#)}

The need for supplementary information demonstrates the problem of narrative art generally: viewers need to know the story from some other source, either textual or oral, to recognize and understand what they are seeing. This is especially true of works that capture only one moment or episode of a longer story. By themselves, pictures can reference a longer narrative, but viewers must have some prior knowledge not only to discern the subjects but also to comprehend the depiction’s logic or its placement in a larger composition or context.

Portraits, however, despite also benefiting from captions to identify their subjects, are different. They do not tell a story but rather present a character. When his friend

Severus founded a church, Paulinus appears to have approved the inclusion of Saint Martin of Tours' portrait, because it showed a heavenly man who is worthy of imitation. But he was uncomfortable with having his own portrait installed there, as Severus had done, and declared that he was unworthy of the honor—being a lowly figure, shrouded in mental darkness, at best merely a comfort for wretched sinners. Although Paulinus did not explicitly say this, one may surmise that his likeness also bore his name. In any case, he offered a poem to accompany the work, in which he identifies both Martin and himself as the subjects of the viewer's gaze.⁵⁷ This is strong evidence for a shift from historical scenes to sacred portraits. While the narrative form, which evidently remained in monumental contexts, continued to guide viewers' meditations, sometimes with the aid of supplemental texts, these new types increasingly offered direct encounters with saints' visages, supplemented by the holy persons' names.

Although Paulinus regarded pictures as best supplemented by texts in one way or another, Pope Gregory the Great, in two well-known letters from the turn of the seventh century, suggested that they could themselves substitute for writing. Addressing a fellow bishop, Serenus of Marseille, Gregory revealed his view of art as primarily didactic but, as such, useful for spreading and strengthening Christian piety.⁵⁸ In the first of these letters, dated July 599, Gregory indicates that word has come to him that Serenus smashed images and threw them out of

his churches after noticing that some of his flock were adoring them. Although Gregory condones Serenus's concerns about idolatrous worship of human-made objects, he admonishes him for taking this action. For, he explains, "a picture is provided in churches for the reason that those who are illiterate may at least read by looking at the walls what they cannot read in books."[59](#)

In his second letter, written a little over a year later (October 600), Gregory is clearly upset that Serenus has ignored his instructions and excused his actions by saying that he assumed the first letter to be a forgery. In this instance, Gregory is more specific about the kinds of objects that Serenus was still destroying, calling them "images of the saints" (*sanctorum imagines*). He also reiterates his argument, that although Serenus should not permit any adoration of pictures, learning what should be worshiped through gazing at images is salutary, especially for the uneducated or ignorant. Gregory adds that pictures can serve in place of texts, especially for those he describes as *gentes*, by which he might mean pagans or foreigners who know no Latin.[60](#)

Gregory's argument has a possibly earlier analogue, in a portion of another letter from a bishop to a subordinate—although, as with the works of Eusebius and Epiphanius discussed above, its authenticity is questionable. Attributed to Hypatius of Ephesus (519–40), the letter assures Julian of Atramyction that he need not destroy certain images that he had found, even though he believed that scripture

forbids representations of holy things in both painting and relief sculpture. Apparently, like Gregory, Hypatius discouraged his brother bishop from all-out destruction, arguing that simple folk might benefit from being introduced to the saints in this form and be guided by and through such things to a more intelligible and immaterial knowledge of divine matters.⁶¹ Although it reflects a similar impulse to Gregory's, scholars have argued that this letter should be dated to the early eighth century, in part because its first recorded appearance is among documents amassed by ninth-century iconophiles and it suspiciously echoes the defense of icons in letters of the patriarch Germanos of Constantinople (r. 715–40) and the apologetic orations of John of Damascus (d. 749).⁶²

Even if one cautiously excludes Eusebius's *Letter to Constantia* and Epiphanius's multiple anti-image writings, more clearly authentic textual evidence reveals some concern over the veneration of holy pictures from the fourth century onward. Although church authorities like Bishop Serenus of Marseille had misgivings, they may have accepted and tolerated such objects for the sake of the uneducated or less spiritually advanced members of their congregations. That images already played an edifying role was a reason that Bishop Paulinus of Nola chose to include depictions of saints and sacred stories in his basilica. His justification for setting up these works does not leave much room for doubt that they existed and were displayed as

attractions that would increase the piety and improve the behavior of viewers.

By the early sixth century, representations of saints surrounding Christ or the Virgin Mary were becoming more and more the norm for the decoration of church apses (see fig. 6.8). A particularly fine example dated to the 530s appears in the Euphrasian Basilica at Poreč in Istria. One of the earliest apse depictions of the seated Virgin holding the Christ child, this mosaic includes figures of angels presenting the church's patron saint, Maurus, Bishop Euphrasius (holding a model of the church), the archdeacon Claudius, and the archdeacon's son, also named Euphrasius, to the Virgin, who receives a jeweled wreath from the hand of God (see fig. 5.6).⁶³



FIGURE 5.6 Apse mosaic of Bishop Euphrasius and companions presented to the Madonna and Child with saints and clergy, Euphrasian Basilica, Poreč, Istria, 530s. (Photo: Hemis / Alamy Stock Photo.)

CONCLUSION

Although they are also two-dimensional, portraits of Christ and the saints are categorically different from the earlier narrative images in Christian art, which mainly drew upon Bible stories. Even those portraits that might have been embedded in narrative scenes, like the paintings described by Basil, Asterius, and Prudentius, prompted viewers to engage them prayerfully. In this face-to-face encounter, as it were, the images became vehicles for offering veneration to their models.

Early on, such practices drew criticism from certain church authorities who regarded the behavior as similar to pagan idolatry. In time, however, other commentators praised the work of artists (either rhetorical or real) as vividly rendering the suffering of martyrs in ways that could inspire viewers to imitate and venerate these heroic witnesses. Gradually, Christians developed a cult of icons that in some respects paralleled the treatment that polytheists accorded the effigies of their gods. Christians honored the models whom the paintings depicted, offering them prayers and praise, while (also like polytheists) consciously avoiding confusing human-made objects with actual holy persons.

A remaining question is how someone would produce or evaluate the likeness of a long-dead saint or, even more, an incarnate divine being (i.e., Christ). Apart from the problem of his invisible divine nature, Christ and most of the saints were no longer on earth for artists to use as from-life models. What does the term *likeness* mean if the original is absent? Furthermore, even a from-life portrait depicts only the outward appearance of its model at a single moment or stage of life. How could this be accounted as the whole truth? Visages change in an instant and over a lifetime. This question brings us back to the story of the apostle John's reported objection to Lycomedes's icon of him. If portraits are merely superficial representations of a person's exterior and transitory appearance and cannot also depict the character, virtues, or soul of the one being imaged, how might they communicate anything of value beyond some conventionally recognizable form? The answer to this involves the ways that certain portraits may offer more than simple records of physical traits and instead be more akin to the vision of the seer in the book of Revelation. The rendering of a likeness is not so much about the appearance of the one portrayed as about how the picture may present itself to the imagination and memory of the actively viewing subject.

6

THE TRUE LIKENESS

Imagination wrought these images of the gods, a wiser and subtler artist by far than imitation: for imitation can create only what it has seen, but imagination what it has not seen.

PHILOSTRATUS, *LIFE OF APOLLONIUS*

As discussed in the previous chapter, from the late fourth through the early seventh century, increasing reverence paid to portraits of Christ and the saints was balanced by concerns about this practice expressed by some church authorities. An overview of the evidence indicates that theologians of the period differed on whether there were benefits or grave risks in the production of such images and their display in churches.

Writings of John Chrysostom, Gregory of Nyssa, Basil of Caesarea, Asterius of Amasea, and Prudentius suggest that pictures of saints, in either narrative scenes or formal portraits, were installed in their shrines and thus directly associated with their bodily remains in order to foster

devotion to those whom they portrayed. Yet the development of portrait-type images toward the end of the fourth century, along with textual references to such works, reveals that this particular kind of figurative art could also be controversial. While no fourth- or fifth-century theologian had crafted a defense of images, and holy icons do not appear to have been part of the official church liturgy at that time, these saints' portraits had evidently started to be a focus of certain devotional practices, not altogether unlike pagan cult images before them.

A late but illuminating instance of addressing the parallels between those pagan cult images and portraits of Christ and the saints is found in a text attributed to Bishop John of Thessaloniki. It is dated to roughly the first half of the seventh century and was included in the documents presented in evidence at the Second Council of Nicaea (787), which ratified the church's use of holy icons. One section recounts a (probably fictional) dialogue between a pagan and a Christian in which the former contends that Christian veneration of icons is no different than his veneration of images of his gods. He also explains that he worships not the images themselves but rather the incorporeal divinities that they merely depict. Instead of addressing the practice, the Christian interlocutor focuses on the models. He points out that Christian icons portray saintly persons who actually lived and had visible countenances. Their representations are thereby based in reality. Similarly, representations of Jesus Christ are

allowed precisely because he came to live among humans as one of them. The Christian distinguishes between portraits of true beings and effigies of the “false” gods of polytheists, which he contends are mere inventions. In response, the pagan cleverly observes that angels, which Christians include in their iconography, never were humans nor ever lived among them. In this respect, he says, they are like the pagan deities. The Christian replies that angels have been seen and thus can be depicted.^{[1](#)}

PAGAN PARALLELS

Apparently, the gods’ images that Christians found most objectionable were freestanding statues, busts, and relief sculptures: things sculpted, cast, or molded in metal, stone, or wood rather than two-dimensional works.^{[2](#)} A much different type of representation, however, was the gods’ portraits on panels (*pinakes*), many found in Egypt, that some historians regard as probable models for later Christian saints’ icons.^{[3](#)} For example, a triptych panel painting now in the Getty Museum in Los Angeles displays Serapis and Isis flanking a man who was presumably the work’s owner (see fig. 6.1). Others show Heron and Lykourgos, or Isis with the infant Horus in her lap, bearing a distinct resemblance to later depictions of the Virgin Mary with the Christ child.^{[4](#)}



FIGURE 6.1 Triptych with portraits of Serapis, a human male, and Isis, Egypt, 100–200. (J. Paul Getty Museum, 74.AP.21, 74.AP.20, and 74.AP.22. Photo: Getty Open Content.)

Like later Byzantine icons, these portraits are painted on wood, sometimes with the panels having raised edges to create frames. They occasionally have sliding covers or are linked together as triptychs. The construction and composition of these artifacts suggest that Christian icon portraits were a Christian innovation but modeled on certain preexisting Roman cult images.⁵ Yet while Egyptian panel portraits of gods are stylistically similar to and share many compositional elements with later Christian saints' icons, at least one scholar has argued, not unlike John of Thessaloniki's Christian apologist, that the former are critically different from the latter, insofar as saints' images represent individuals who actually lived, whereas depictions of pagan deities are based on mythological

narratives.⁶ While this point is valid, it ignores the problem of artists' not knowing how their models looked in life and calls to mind Dio Chrysostom's *Olympic Discourse*, in which he argues that artists depend on poets' descriptions in representing gods, but when they deviate, they introduce their own imagined elements and thus become the poets' rivals.⁷

EVALUATING HOLY PORTRAITS' VERACITY

The late and probably invented debate attributed to John of Thessaloniki echoes some of the rhetoric of Minucius Felix's *Octavius* (see chapter 1). It addresses the long-standing issue of who or what could or should not be pictorially portrayed but also raises new interesting and relevant questions about how artists could produce a valid likeness of a long-dead holy person. Distinguishing between pagan idols and Christian icons mandated separating false gods from the true one, and a true or valid holy portrait had an added qualification: the model (whether a deity, an angel, or a saint) must have appeared on earth in a visible, corporeal form. Thus, Jesus could be portrayed in visual art because he had been incarnate as a living human being. As Augustine remarked in the early fifth century, since no artist at that time knew what Christ had looked in life, he was depictable so long as he was represented as a man.⁸

Yet without eyewitness descriptions or living models, artists still had to invent Christ's and the saints' physical

features, and these could vary from one representation to the next. Augustine allowed that inconsistent depictions of Christ, the Virgin Mary, and Peter and Paul existed, and even seemed unphased by them. By contrast, Epiphanius allegedly decried such inconsistency, saying that artists lied by representing Christ with long hair or the saints sometimes as old men and sometimes as youths, according to the illustrator's whim.⁹ This echoes earlier Christian criticisms of depictions of pagan gods, such as Minucius Felix's complaint that Jupiter sometimes appears with a beard and sometimes without one, or Arnobius's observation that facial hair and eye color change from image to image of the same divinity.¹⁰

For many early Christian theologians, a saint was more truly encountered by studying his or her words and deeds than by viewing a painted portrait. John Chrysostom regarded Saint Paul as the archetype of the perfect Christian and maintained that those who attended to his words could produce an accurate image of him in their imaginations.¹¹ In the argument appended to his homilies on Paul's Epistle to the Romans, Chrysostom acknowledges that he cannot see Paul as he looked in life, but he believes that as he hears Paul's words read out, he experiences the saint's visible presence: "As I keep hearing the Epistles of the blessed Paul read, . . . gladly do I enjoy the spiritual trumpet, and get roused and warmed with desire at recognising the voice so dear to me, and seem to fancy him all but present to my sight, and behold him conversing with

me.”¹² From the pulpit, John compared the ways that the faithful should listen attentively to a homily to how painters carefully fashion their portraits: “Go into a painter’s study, and you will observe how silent all is there. Then so ought it to be here [in church]: for here too we are employed in painting portraits, royal portraits, . . . by means of the colours of virtue. The artist [is] the Holy Spirit.”¹³

Similarly, Basil of Caesarea argued that studying the lives of saints is like seeing them in person and imitating their virtues. In one of his letters, he even compares this exercise to the way portrait artists work, first examining their models carefully and then attempting to capture their features in a painting: “Just as painters in working from models constantly gaze at their exemplar and thus strive to transfer the expression of the original to their own artistry, so too he who is anxious to make himself perfect in all the kinds of virtue must gaze upon the lives of the saints as upon statues, so to speak, that move and act, and must make their excellence his own by imitation.”¹⁴ The analogy does not precisely validate images as effective spiritual aids but does recognize that the best of them reflect more than external appearances. Likening a pious Christian attempting to imitate a saint’s holy life to a painter trying to replicate a saint’s visible features implies that an excellent portrait might disclose something about the model’s interior qualities or character.¹⁵

RECOGNIZING THE SAINTS

Apart from a few church authorities who expressed their concerns about inconsistent features and artists' whims, early viewers seem not to have been terribly worried about how accurate the depictions of long-dead saints or apostles might be. Instead, it was likely more important that the images corresponded to viewers' expectations, which were shaped by conventions and preexisting models that became standard over time and also guided the iconographer's work. They were not simply artists' fantasized external appearances. Portraits conformed to prototypes, and artists relied upon established tradition. Icon makers were neither expected to deviate from tradition nor encouraged to express personal creativity.¹⁶ Ancient portraits of Christ and the saints (i.e., icons) are therefore not like modern portraits. They are not, nor can they be, exact likenesses of their models, and their truthfulness seems based less on perceived resemblance than on recognition or even just evocation.¹⁷

This raises the question of whether these images are really portraits at all, at least according to a customary definition of the word.¹⁸ It may be appropriate to distinguish icons from portraits in their functions and their objectives. A sacred icon is not a visual record of an ordinary individual's outward appearance but rather the stylized representation of a holy person that is intended to express the subject's particular sanctity, facilitate viewers' pious devotion, inspire saintly imitation, and even create a sense of the model's mystical presence.¹⁹ The image's

aesthetic qualities, artistic expression, and asserted resemblance to the model are arguably irrelevant.

Certain elements of sacred portraits facilitated these objectives. By the late fourth century, an individual's sanctity was indicated by a glowing nimbus or mandorla around the head or full body. Secular rulers had often been depicted with an aureole around their heads, and in Christian art the halo seems to have been applied first to portraits of Christ and then gradually to those of the saints.²⁰ Other features, physical attributes, and stylistic and iconographic conventions not only helped to identify the subjects but also highlighted their personal virtues. For example, in Paulinus's basilica, icons were often captioned with the saint's name (see chapter 5), a practice that traditional icon painters still follow. When Paulinus referred to the portrait of Saint Martin, he described it as the depiction of a heavenly soul, worthy of imitation, his countenance gleaming with outward radiance.²¹ Less obvious but most important was the iconographer's reliance on artistic exemplars. As discussed above, Basil of Caesarea described painters as continually returning to existing prototypes in order to replicate them. He noted, however, that the value of the resulting works was less in their faithfulness to the originals than in their ability to turn viewers' minds toward the virtues of the depicted saints as though to living and moving statues.²²

Nevertheless, questions of why or how certain images became authoritative persist. An artist's reliance upon

received tradition could, at least theoretically, be insufficient by itself, and further verification was sometimes desirable. While most icons were copies of prototypes, a few were believed to be firsthand, literal likenesses, made from life. Some were reportedly produced from visions, and others were validated by supernatural events. Stories of saints miraculously appearing in visions to assist painters also exist, although most date to a much later period.^{[23](#)} Accounts of Saint Luke painting the Virgin (some versions claim he had assistance from the angel Gabriel) seem not to have circulated widely before the eighth century, and other instances of miraculous interventions, such as that involving the Holy Face (*Volto santo*) of Lucca, a wooden corpus of Christ believed to have been begun by Nicodemus but completed by an angel as he slept, are said to have happened considerably later.^{[24](#)}

The conventions of icon painting became crucial for establishing identity. Episodes in which devotees recognize the saints who appear in dreams and visions simply by their likeness to their icons turn up in the literary record. The fifth-century *Acts of Saint Sylvester* relates how the emperor Constantine, suffering from leprosy, was directed by a vision of Saints Peter and Paul to Bishop Sylvester for baptism and a miraculous healing. Apparently, the emperor distinguished the two holy apostles purely on the basis of their resemblance to an icon depicting them.^{[25](#)} Another example appears in the *Miracles of Saint Demetrios*, compiled in the sixth and seventh centuries. Here Saint

Demetrios appears to sufferers with the plague, instructing them to come to church for healing. When they arrive, he makes the sign of the cross over those he wishes to save, and one recognizes him from his mosaic portrait in the sanctuary.^{[26](#)}

Similarly, the physician saints Cosmas and Damian reportedly appeared to a desperately ill Saint Theodore of Sykeon (d. 613), who determined who they were because they looked exactly like they did in the icon hanging above his bed.^{[27](#)} Another case recounts the seventh-century miracle of Saint Artemios, in which a dangerously sick twelve-year-old girl was carried by angels and the saint himself and set down near his tomb. Following her miraculous healing, she explained that she had identified the saint from an icon that she regularly saw in church.^{[28](#)}

In each of these stories, a portrait icon allows the devotee to recognize his or her saintly patron. This process reverses the commonly applied means of evaluating an ordinary portrait based on how well it captures the model's outward appearance. Here the portrait verifies the likeness and, in turn, the vision verifies the portrait. Making similarity to an existing prototype the criterion of authenticity challenges the long-established Platonic objection to art as merely mimetic and therefore untrue. Here truth is measured by how well it imitates art.

THE POLYMORPHIC CHRIST

Evaluating the truthfulness of Christ's portraits is particularly problematic. As Eusebius is said to have argued in his *Letter to Constantia*, no artist can depict Christ's invisible divine nature, and showing only his human appearance is erroneous and even heretical (see chapter 5). Yet although during his earthly life Christ certainly had a face by which his followers presumably recognized him, virtually no eyewitness descriptions of him exist in any extant documents, including the canonical Gospels. Furthermore, these Gospels imply that Jesus might alter his countenance or be indistinguishable both before and after his death and resurrection. In the transfiguration event, his face and his garments became suffused with light (see Matt 17:2 and parallels). Later, in Luke's post-resurrection narrative, his followers failed to recognize him as they traveled with him on the road to Emmaus and realized who he was only when he broke bread with them (Luke 24:13-43).

Other Gospel texts suggest that Christ's appearance varies from viewer to viewer. In Mark's longer ending, which probably postdates the rest of the Gospel, Jesus appears first to Mary Magdalene and then in a different form to two of his disciples (Mark 16:12). The Gospel of John portrays Mary Magdalene as mistaking the risen Christ for a gardener and recognizing him only when he speaks to her (John 20:15-16). Later in that Gospel, the risen Jesus stands on the beach, but his disciples out fishing in their boats do not realize who he is. They know

him only once they pull in a miraculous number of fish after he tells them to cast the net on the other side (John 21:4). These instances of failing to distinguish the risen Christ are sometimes linked with Paul's affirmation that "even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way" (2 Cor 5:16).

Certain noncanonical Gospels also mention this problem of identification and portray Jesus in a variety of changeable forms. For example, in the apocryphal *Acts of Peter*, Peter relates his encounter with the transfigured Jesus (cf. Matt 17:1-9; Mark 9:2-23; Luke 9:28-36), remarking how the Lord's brightness nearly blinded him and caused him to fall to the ground and close his eyes. However, when he arose and opened his eyes again, he saw Jesus in a form that he could not comprehend. The Lord, he says, was simultaneously large and small, beautiful and ugly, young and old. While he materializes in time, he is yet invisible in eternity. In the next chapter, when Peter prays for the healing of some blind widows, the room is suddenly suffused with an unbearably bright light, which penetrates the widows' eyes and cures their blindness. When Peter asks what they have seen, some respond that they saw an old man with indescribable features. Others claim to have seen a boy who tenderly touched their eyes. Peter praises the Lord and tells the assembly that these women are confirmation that God is manifest in different forms because God is far greater than our imaginations or thoughts.^{[29](#)}

The *Acts of John* similarly portrays Jesus as having an elusive and inconsistent appearance. In a section that narrates John's encounter with the Ephesian couple Andronicus and Drusiana, Drusiana reports that Christ revealed himself to her both as a youth and in the form of John himself. Explaining how this perplexing experience was plausible, John recalls that when Jesus first summoned him and his brother James while they were fishing, he appeared to James in the guise of a child calling from the shore and to John in that of a handsome and amiable man. When they left their boat and nets to follow him, Jesus transformed again: suddenly, he was balding and thickly bearded. Such puzzling changes evidently kept happening. John says that the more he tried to see Jesus as he was, the more he kept evolving, first into a small and unattractive man and then into one tall enough to reach heaven.^{[30](#)}

Other apocryphal documents relate similar stories. The *Apocryphon of John* recounts a parallel incident, in which Jesus looks first like a child, then an elderly person, then a youth, and finally a multiform figure with three distinct manifestations emerging one from the other to reveal that the Savior is simultaneously Father, Mother, and Son.^{[31](#)} A legend in the *Acts of Andrew and Matthias* (the latter also called Matthew) includes an episode in which Andrew fails to realize that Jesus has disguised himself as the pilot of the boat that Andrew boards to travel to the land of the man-eaters (*anthropophagi*) to rescue Matthew. Once Andrew alights, he realizes he had been conversing with

Jesus for the entire journey. Asking pardon for not having recognized his Lord, Andrew begs Jesus to reveal himself. Jesus consents, but this time in the likeness of a beautiful child. Andrew asks why Jesus does not appear to him and whether this is because Andrew has sinned. Jesus responds that his seeming resistance is not because of Andrew's sin but to show that he can do anything and take any form he chooses.^{[32](#)}

A mention of Christ's polymorphism occurs as late as the sixth century, in the diary of a pilgrim to Jerusalem. The pilgrim mentions seeing a miraculously made image of Christ imprinted on a piece of cloth. This portrait, he claims, is too brilliant to gaze directly upon, and what is more, it keeps altering its form as viewers look at it.^{[33](#)}

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITERS ON JESUS'S APPEARANCE

Besides noncanonical stories of Jesus's polymorphic manifestations, certain Hebrew scripture passages allude to Christ's physical features, at least according to several early Christian writers. Among these are the description of the suffering servant in Isaiah (53:2a), who has "no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him," and the text of Psalm 45 (verse 2) that describes the "mighty one" as "the most handsome of men." As if to resolve the seeming discrepancy in these biblical texts, both of which Christians take to refer to Christ, in his dialogue with the Jew Trypho,

Justin Martyr explains that Christ has varying physical manifestations. At his first coming he was said to be of ordinary mortal appearance, undistinguished and even unattractive. But, Justin insists, in his second coming he will be revealed in his full, radiant glory.³⁴ By contrast, Clement of Alexandria maintained that while the Lord was outwardly unattractive, his true beauty was manifest in his soul and body—in charity in the former and immortality in the latter.³⁵

Origen too tried to account for Jesus's variable form, but with an eye more to his followers' ability to comprehend him. Against Celsus, Origen asserted that if Jesus truly wanted to show himself to be divine, he would have manifested himself to everyone, universally and publicly, after his resurrection. Instead, in the transfiguration event, when Jesus's physical appearance was altered, only Peter, James, and John were able to witness it, as they alone had the capacity to perceive his luminous splendor. Origen also explained that while Jesus was still alive, everyone could see him, in one form or another. Yet in his resurrection, Christ was no longer visible to the multitude. He revealed himself only to those able to comprehend his divinity. Origen concluded that Christ was sent into the world not only to become known but also to be hidden. Many who saw him would not realize who he was in any respect, and what Christ was in his fullness was concealed even from those who knew him well.³⁶

Later in his dialogue with Celsus, Origen acknowledges that the Isaiah passage mentioned above could refer to Christ's incarnate form but insists, like Clement, that true beauty is not always visible to the eye.³⁷ Celsus had evidently used this biblical text against Origen: "[Celsus] says that *if a divine spirit was in a body, it must certainly have differed from other bodies in size or beauty or strength or voice or striking appearance or powers of persuasion. For it is impossible that a body which had something more divine than the rest should be no different from any other. Yet Jesus' body was no different from any other, but, as they say, was little and ugly and undistinguished.*"³⁸ Origen replies, "Admittedly it is written that the body of Jesus was ugly, but not, as he asserted, that it was also undistinguished; nor is there any clear indication that he was little."³⁹ Then, in an effort to complicate the issue, he points to the Psalm passage quoted above to assert that Christ was exceptionally beautiful.

Tertullian likewise allowed that Christ's countenance was nothing to marvel at but stressed that its very ordinariness was proof of his particular—and therefore true—human nature. Moreover, Tertullian insisted that people were drawn to Jesus because of his words and works rather than his beauty. He claimed that Christ's unattractiveness even prompted contempt among those who misunderstood that when he was incarnate, his flesh was earthly and thus capable of being despised and abused.⁴⁰

More than a century later, John Chrysostom similarly drew upon that Psalm text to assert that Jesus was “the most handsome of men.” Yet he noted that this was Christ in the transfiguration, in which his true beauty shone forth, as it would in the resurrection. In the incarnation, Christ was an object of human scorn, not a prince reclining on a golden bed but a baby lying in a manger. He lived like a simple man, not garbed in luxurious clothes or eating rich foods. He did this to confound expectations and trample upon human pride.^{[41](#)}

EVOLVING AND DIVERGENT PORTRAITS OF CHRIST

By John Chrysostom’s time, the visual portraits of Christ that were produced in painting, mosaics, and relief sculpture had begun to change. Depictions in the narrative iconography of the third and fourth centuries show Christ as a beardless youth with long, curly hair (see fig. 4.3). By the late fourth or early fifth century, he had become a fully bearded mature male with dark hair parted in the middle and reaching his shoulders (see fig. 4.7). Instead of a healer or wonder-worker, this new image type shows Christ as enthroned or ascended to heaven and flanked by his apostles or saints. Rather than indicate Christ’s polymorphism, however, this pictorial evolution from young savior to more mature deity may correspond to the teaching that emerged from the early fourth-century Trinitarian controversy, that the Divine Son is the equal of the Father. This new type may also have been a response to

mounting debates over Jesus's two natures and the way his visible, bodily humanity was united to the eternal and incorporeal Divine Word.⁴² As we saw in chapter 5, Eusebius purportedly expressed the concern that any true depiction of Jesus is impossible, because no one can portray both his incarnate manifestation and his invisible divine glory.

The bearded, lordly figure did not immediately replace the earlier type; sometimes both occur in close proximity. An example of this juxtaposition is found in the Roman mausoleum known as Santa Costanza, built for Constantine's daughter Constantina, who died in 354. Two of this building's most prominent features are the original mosaics found in the small apses opening off the circular ambulatory.⁴³ One depicts Christ with the apostles Peter and Paul; the other shows him with only Peter. Each represents Jesus in a radically different way, even taking into account that the mosaics have been heavily restored over the centuries.⁴⁴ The mosaic with both apostles portrays Jesus as youthful and fair, standing on the rock of paradise, from which the four Edenic rivers spring (see fig. 6.2). He wears a golden tunic with two blue stripes under a golden pallium and hands a scroll to a reverently bowing figure (Peter?). The scroll is inscribed "Dominus pacem dat" (The Lord gives peace), which is most likely a later restorer's substitution for the more usual and expected formula "Dominus legem dat" (The Lord gives the Law).⁴⁵ The two booths on the sides suggest some overlap with the

story of the transfiguration, in which Peter, James, and John see Moses and Elijah alongside Jesus, and Peter offers to make dwellings for them (see Matt 17:3-4 and parallels).⁴⁶



FIGURE 6.2 Apse mosaic from Rome's Santa Costanza Mausoleum, Jesus with Peter and Paul, ca. 450. (Photo by the author.)

The other apse mosaic at Santa Costanza represents Christ as a mature and darkly bearded ruler, enthroned on the blue orb of the world, robed in a dark purple tunic embellished with two vertical golden stripes (see fig. 6.3). It looks as if he is handing keys to Peter, a motif usually called the *traditio clavium*.⁴⁷ These strikingly divergent depictions of Christ have prompted some art historians to

identify the enthroned figure not as Jesus but as Moses or even God the Father.⁴⁸ Yet while this dark and bearded Jesus is earlier by almost a half century, he is like the Christ enthroned in the apse of Rome's basilica of Santa Pudenziana, dated to the early fifth century and the pontificate of Innocent I (401-17). This Christ sits upon a jeweled throne, surrounded by his apostles (see fig. 6.4). The backdrop is the cityscape of the new Jerusalem (Rev 21:10-14). Behind the walls of this gilded city rises a gemmed cross mounted on the rock of Golgotha, flanked by the four living creatures from the book of Revelation (4:6-8).



FIGURE 6.3 Apse mosaic from Rome's Santa Costanza Mausoleum, Jesus with Peter, ca. 450. (Photo by the author.)



FIGURE 6.4 Christ enthroned, detail from the apse of the basilica of Santa Pudenziana, Rome, ca. 410. (Photo by the author.)

In other places, differing depictions of Christ also occur in proximity, including the panels of certain sarcophagi that represent him in multiple narrative scenes, sometimes bearded and sometimes clean shaven. On one sarcophagus found in Arles, France, the central niche has a bearded Jesus standing on the rock of Eden and presenting an unfurled scroll to Peter on his right, with Paul as a witness on his left (see fig. 6.5). In the far left and right niches, however, Jesus is beardless. It could be that the change was intended to indicate his status and position in heaven

following his ascension. Because the scroll might represent the new Law, scholars have come to label this composition the *traditio legis* (giving the law), which presents Jesus (or perhaps Peter) as a new Moses.⁴⁹ Some art historians have noted that the scene might have been influenced by classical representations of philosophers and other intellectuals, which conventionally showed them bearded, garbed in pallia, and holding or reading scrolls.⁵⁰ This proposed influence is additionally pertinent because, according to Dio Chrysostom, such traditional representations were themselves based on depictions of senior gods like Jupiter (see fig. 1.4).⁵¹ Nevertheless, contemporaneous and similar images of Jesus handing a scroll to Peter and Paul or seated among the apostles like a philosopher among his disciples vary. Some compositions present him as beardless others as bearded.⁵²



FIGURE 6.5 Early Christian sarcophagus with Jesus giving the Law to Peter and Paul in the center, washing Peter's feet on the left, and before Pilate on the right, end of the fourth century.

(Musée départemental Arles antique, inv. no. FAN.92.00.2487;
used with permission of the museum. Photo by the author.)

Dio Chrysostom's claim might explain why images of Jesus evolved from beardless youth to older, bearded, lordly figure. It could be that the earliest representations of Jesus consciously modeled him on traditional representations of the youthful Greco-Roman deities (e.g., Apollo, Hermes) or semidivine human heroes (e.g., Achilles, Aeneas) and thus as a kind of mediator or savior.⁵³ As he took on the more mature appearance, he came to resemble the older members of the pantheon (especially Jupiter), a transformation that might illustrate his ascension and enthronement in heaven as the one who judges the world.⁵⁴ By the second quarter of the fourth century, following official, doctrinal proclamations of the Father and the Son's shared nature, equal status, and coeternity, artists formulated a new representation that emphasized Christ's likeness to the Father God, perhaps by borrowing and reconceptualizing the traditional iconography of a supreme deity.⁵⁵ That Christians were aware of such a transfer of visual types is demonstrated in the work of a sixth-century historian, Theodorus Lector, which recounts how the patriarch Gennadius (d. 471) healed the withered hand of an artist who had been divinely stricken for daring to picture Christ in the guise of Zeus. Apparently, a certain pagan had commissioned the artist to make an image that

would allow him to continue worshiping his god while ostensibly worshiping Christ.^{[56](#)}

The suggestion that artists depicted Christ according to the appearance of youthful or senior deities depending on their understanding of his person and role vis-à-vis God the Father might explain the evolution of this iconography over the fourth century but not why juxtaposed images (as in Santa Costanza) show him as simultaneously a young, fair-haired savior and an enthroned ruler over heaven and earth. Such contrasting representations would not have been theologically helpful in correcting an earlier, subordinationist Christology which regarded Christ as inferior to the Father, unless they were intended to indicate that Jesus's status changed over his life or after his death, resurrection, and ascension. A simpler explanation is that these artists intentionally varied their images to dissuade viewers from forming a fixed idea of what Christ looked like, similar to stories of his varying post-resurrectional manifestations discussed above. The Divine One might adopt any form he chose, even one that was not stable or instantly recognizable.^{[57](#)} A third possibility might be an effort to affirm that Jesus was not like the saints, who could be identified by their portraits: he was a divine as well as a human being. Perhaps the two representations were intended to display these two natures through distinctive portrait types placed near each other.

An example of juxtaposed contrasting depictions of Christ is the program of small, late fifth- or early sixth-

century mosaics adorning the clerestory of Ravenna's Basilica of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo. Originally dedicated to Christ the Savior, the church was commissioned by the Ostrogothic king Theodoric, who, like other Goths, adhered to a form of Arian Christianity. High on the north wall, a series of thirteen mosaics, based on Gospel narratives, show a youthful, beardless Christ calling his disciples, working wonders, and healing (see fig. 6.6). On the opposite wall, in another series of thirteen small mosaics, Christ appears bearded in scenes that progress from the apse to the door, depicting the Last Supper and his betrayal, trial, empty tomb, and post-resurrection manifestations on the road to Emmaus (see fig. 6.7).



FIGURE 6.6 Mosaic panel showing Jesus calling his disciples, Basilica of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, Ravenna, late fifth century.

(Photo by the author.)



FIGURE 6.7 Mosaic panel showing Jesus on the way to Golgotha, Basilica of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, Ravenna, late fifth century. (Photo by the author.)

Art historians have tried to account for this cycle of divergent depictions of Christ. One proposes that different workshops were responsible for the variations, noting slightly different uses of materials and stylistic details and thereby discounting any theological explanation.^{[58](#)} Yet the simple fact that viewers would have seen these mosaics almost simultaneously and as part of an overall decorative program suggests that they could have assigned meaning

to the changes in any case. Assuming that the mosaicists intended these iconographic distinctions, it seems possible that the dissimilar facial types could have been intended to convey some theological principle.

Given their context—a basilica founded by an Arian ruler for his Arian subjects—explanations for these divergent representations might lie in certain aspects of Ostrogothic Arian Christology. One possibility is that, as suggested above, they together affirm Christ's two distinct (but inseparable) natures, human and divine.⁵⁹ More pertinent to the theological context, however, is the possibility that they illustrate Christ's subordination to the Father.⁶⁰ One scholar proposes that the two distinct facial types might express a particularly Arian claim that Christ's distinct but separable natures were manifest in different circumstances—and that the scenes from his earthly ministry in which he is beardless reveal his divine nature, whereas the scenes in which he is bearded and undergoing his passion reveal his human nature.⁶¹ Although this hypothesis is intriguing, it makes more theological sense when reversed: Jesus's human nature is displayed in the images of his earthly ministry (when he is beardless), and his divine glory comes to be seen in and through his passion, death, and resurrection (when he is bearded), an evolution suggested by the Gospel of John, in which Jesus's wonderful deeds conclude with the events of his passion and entry into glory (John 7:39, 13:31-32, 17:1, 24:26). While one cannot know whether Ostrogothic Arianism adopted such an evolving or

emerging divinity for Christ, the pattern of the images suggests this as a possibility.⁶²

Whatever the reasons for these divergent representations, it is rare to see post-fifth-century depictions of Christ as beardless.⁶³ There were a few exceptions throughout the fifth century and into the sixth. The late fifth-century mosaic in the apse of Thessaloniki's Church of Hosios David (formerly Moni Latomou) depicts Jesus as beardless and enthroned on a rainbow, in a blended reference to the theophanies described in the biblical books of Ezekiel and Revelation (see fig. 3.7). The apse of Ravenna's Basilica of San Vitale (ca. 540) similarly shows a beardless and enthroned Christ. Yet the representation of Christ with long, dark hair parted in the center and reaching to his shoulders and a pointed (sometimes doubly pointed) beard ultimately became conventional.

The apse mosaic of Rome's Basilica of Saints Cosmas and Damian includes one of the most striking images of a darkly bearded Christ. Commissioned by the Ostrogothic queen regent Amalsuntha, Theodoric's daughter, it was a gift to Rome's Pope Felix and dates to around 525–30. Here Christ appears to float above the earth against a night sky streaked with sunrise-tinted clouds (see fig. 6.8). He makes the classic gesture of the Roman orator and seems to be addressing the viewer rather than the figures standing beneath and flanking him (Saints Peter, Paul, Cosmas, Damian, and Theodore, as well as Pope Felix, who presents

him with the gift of the church). A phoenix in a palm tree off to the left symbolizes his bodily resurrection; his place in the sky signals his ascension.



FIGURE 6.8 Apse mosaic, Basilica of Cosmas and Damiano, Rome, ca. 536–30. (Photo: Ivan Vdovin / Alamy Stock Photo.)

CONCLUSION

Despite the increasing importance of portraits of Christ and the saints, their validity was not dependent on resemblance to their models. Viewers did not know what the saints had looked like when they were alive, so likeness was not asserted in the sense of recognizability without the inclusion of a name or identifiable attributes. Artists may

have modeled their portraits on existing iconographic subjects (e.g., certain gods or philosophers) that reflected particular aspects of character, such as compassion, wisdom, majesty, or power. In time, these artists' images became the means by which visionaries knew which holy person had appeared to them. It also seems possible that the adaptation of these types expressed the triumph of the Christian religion over polytheism, and thus these portraits were acceptable icons rather than deplorable idols.

While the development of Jesus's portrait image is often explained as an outcome of Christological debates that affirmed his humanity (which means that he had a visible human face), that Christ had a physical body and external appearance was never in doubt. This was Augustine's point: that above all he had a human face. Indeed, early Christian art did not hesitate to depict Jesus in scenes from the Gospel narratives. Nevertheless, this argument was crucial to defenders of icons during the eighth- and ninth-century controversies over images, even as it had been countered by those who, like the author of the *Letter to Constantia* attributed to Eusebius, insisted that figurative portrayals of Christ could not truly represent both his divinity and his humanity. Yet according to the ninth-century defender of icons Nicephorus, the patriarch of Constantinople, the representation of Christ was invented not in Eusebius's time but long before and was even contemporaneous with the Gospels themselves.[64](#)

Centuries after the first portraits of Christ and the saints emerged, the most famous advocate of icons, John of Damascus, profoundly structured his argument in their defense. He asserted that all knowledge is based on recognition of the connections between signifieds and signifiers, or reality and its sensible figures. As he explained, the Son is the perfect icon of the Father, and humans are themselves created in the image and likeness of God. Divine beings, like insensible truths, are comprehended through mediating exemplars, among them sacred stories and holy icons. Saints' portraits, particularly, have direct links to their models, functioning in the same way that a symbol refers to its underlying reality.⁶⁵ This explanation permits Christians to venerate icons without practicing idolatry. These representations may be given honors, carried in processions, or ascribed miracles, since they are the visible symbols that make the reality known, present, and approachable. All prayers and offerings are thereby transmitted to the reality, which is not only pointed to but also participated in by the symbol.

7

MIRACULOUS AND MEDIATING PORTRAITS

Now what the image is on earth by virtue of imitation, the Son is by nature. Just as in works of art the likeness depends on the form, so in the case of the divine and uncompounded nature the unity of likeness consists in the communion of the Godhead.

BASIL OF CAESAREA, *ON THE HOLY SPIRIT*

The sixth-century Jerusalem pilgrim's account of seeing an image of Christ miraculously imprinted on cloth, discussed in the previous chapter, belongs to a long-attested tradition of such portraits, usually—but not always—of Jesus. Although those not-made-by-human-hands portraits (*acheiropoieta*), along with their widely distributed copies, validated artists' representations of Christ with a dark beard and shoulder-length hair, their supernatural origins made them truer than any such depictions. Not only were they verified likenesses, but their direct link to their model endowed them with agency and power. Having materialized

without any benefit of human craft, they possessed an almost autonomous potency and presence.

Sometimes sacred icons that were not miraculously produced were also credited with special miracle-working capacity. They were believed to answer prayers and mediate miracles. Not simply passive instruments to aid petitioners' veneration of their models, these exceptional images were presumed to be responsive and even animated. Certain ones were said to cry, to bleed, even to speak. Devotees treated them as if they were the depicted holy persons themselves. They draped them with garlands, dressed them, and processed them through city streets.

Although miraculous and miracle-working images constitute a special class, saints' portraits generally may be likened to saints' relics insofar as a likeness corresponds in certain respects to bodily remains. While not a fragment from a corpse or derived from some kind of physical contact with the holy person, the saint's portrait nonetheless has an advantage: it is able to exchange gazes with the viewer, in a way that a bit of bone (for example) cannot. Viewers look icons in the eye, and they look back. This exchange of gazes also renders portraits distinctly different from narrative images, which relate or recall a story. The icon's purpose is less didactic: it aims at facilitating a viewer's engagement with the model.¹ Relics, which are usually enclosed in precious containers, cannot return the devotee's gaze in the same way. Yet they are also images in a sense. They are tangibly linked to the departed

saint in a way that icons are not. They physically connect souls raised on high to their bodily remains below. Thus, both relics and portraits are capable of mediating the presence of the holy persons to which they are joined either by artistically rendered likeness or by actual material substance.^{[2](#)}

PORTRAITS NOT MADE BY HUMAN HANDS

One of the earliest recorded miraculous Christian images is associated with the legendary King Abgar of Edessa. As in the tale of Veronica's veil in the medieval West, Abgar's portrait is said to have materialized when Christ pressed a cloth to his face and transferred his likeness to it (see fig. 7.1). Although the original no longer survives, its copies act as direct links to Christ's visage, no less sacred than that initial cloth icon or a direct, bodily-contact image-relic like the Shroud of Turin, to which the cloth is often compared and even sometimes equated.^{[3](#)}



FIGURE 7.1 Panel painting of King Abgar holding a cloth with an imprinted image of Christ, detail from the *History of King Abgar and Saints*, ca. 940, now at Saint Catherine's Monastery, Mount Sinai, Egypt. (Photo: DeA Picture Library / Art Resource, NY.)

The legend of Abgar's miraculous portrait of Christ has survived in several documentary versions, from a sixth-century work through the thirteenth-century *Golden Legend* of Jacobus de Voragine.⁴ This story and its related iconic artifacts played a prominent role in the history of Byzantine Christianity, not only because the portrait functioned as a divinely made and thus "true" image of Christ's face but also because it was believed to possess wonder-working power. By the tenth century it had come to serve as the palladium of the empire and the imperial dynasty's protective device.

One of the earliest accounts of Abgar's image, attributed to Evagrius (d. ca. 592), recounts its miraculous assistance during the Persian siege of Edessa.⁵ Evagrius omits information about how it was produced or what it looked like, however. A Syriac source dated to the first part of the fifth century and incorporated into the *Doctrina Addai* tells the more elaborated story of a certain Hannan, King Abgar's secretary, who brings a letter from the king to Christ. In this account, the king writes to confess that he believes Jesus to be the Son of God and, having heard that he works miraculous cures, invites him to Edessa to rid him of a disease. Hannan delivers the letter and receives Christ's reply that he is unable to travel but will send one of his disciples to restore the king's health. In the meantime, Jesus allows the secretary to paint his portrait. Hannan returns to Abgar with the image, which the king installs in a place of honor in his palace.⁶

Similar narratives date to about two centuries later. In the Greek *Acts of Thaddeus*, the courtier is named Ananias. He is dispatched by Abgar with a letter to Jesus asking him to come and heal the king's incurable disease. Abgar also charges Ananias to observe Christ carefully and fix his appearance in his memory in order to report it back. Apparently, however, Christ's face is impossible to discern. In one recension of the text that echoes stories of his shifting manifestations (see chapter 6), the difficulty is caused by Christ's ever-changing aspect: he appears first one way and then another. Taking pity on the frustrated courier, Christ washes his face and imprints his image on the towel he uses. Ananias returns with the precious relic, and it miraculously cures the king.⁷ The version in the Syriac *Acts of Mar Mari* relates that court painters arrive with the king's ambassadors and are unable to depict Christ's indiscernible face. As in the *Acts of Thaddeus*, Christ obliges the frustrated artists by holding a cloth to his face and thereby producing his own portrait (although reversed, as in a mirror).⁸

Abgar's portrait has many counterparts, including the image of Kamouliana, Veronica's veil, and the Holy Face of Manoppello.⁹ Each of these supernatural prototypes was copied, and the copies came to be regarded as authoritative. Like the originals, their reproductions depict only the face of Jesus, with a pointed beard that divides at the bottom, a drooping mustache, and shoulder-length hair parted in the middle. Their existence, as well as the

miracles they produced, served as verification for eighth- and ninth-century iconodules that icons are divinely sanctioned.^{[10](#)} By means of likeness, in the absence (or loss) of the originals, their faithful reproductions continued to connect the copies to the holy source and its power.

MIRACLE-WORKING IMAGES

Images did not have to be miraculously produced to work miracles, however. As we saw in chapter 4, according to Eusebius, local Christians believed that a statue group in Paneas depicted Christ healing the hemorrhaging woman. A vine that touched the hem of Jesus's cloak was said to cure all manner of diseases.^{[11](#)} Later, in his *The Glory of the Martyrs*, Gregory of Tours (d. ca. 594) reported that so long as this plant reached Jesus's robe, it maintained its curative property. Being cut before it grew that high deprived it of power.^{[12](#)}

In the next chapter of this book, Gregory relates the story of a Jew who stole an image of Christ in order to destroy it. He opens by explaining that some believers inscribe Christ's teachings on tablets and hang pictures of him in their homes and churches. This, he says, makes the Devil envious, so one night the Devil prompted a certain Jew to pry an icon of Christ from the wall of a church where it hung. As soon as the thief inserted a dagger into the painting to lift it, it began to bleed. Once he realized that he was covered in blood, he tried to conceal the object in

his house. In the morning, the local Christians, missing their icon, followed the trail of blood, rescued the painting, and punished the robber.[13](#)

In another tale, Gregory describes a crucifix upon which a seminude corpus hung. The corpus appeared as a man in a vision to the local priest, loudly pleading for a curtain to cover his nakedness. After three days of demands, the vision struck the terrified priest and threatened him with death if he did not provide the corpus a linen covering. The priest finally went to the bishop, who ordered a curtain to cover the crucifix.[14](#)

Even simply gazing at the image of a saintly person might transform a viewer. This effect is described in one of Gregory of Nazianzus's writings. In his poem *On Virtue*, Gregory relates the story of a certain woman prostitute who encountered a portrait of the Athenian philosopher Polemon (314-276 BCE), said to have converted from a thoroughly disreputable character into a temperate and virtuous head of the Academy. Although Polemon was not Christian saint, contemplating the model of the reformed character evidently inspired the woman to cease practicing her profession.[15](#)

Polemon's inspirational portrait has a counterpart in the much later story of Saint Mary of Egypt's conversion. According to a legend recounted by Cyril of Scythopolis around the mid-sixth century, Mary made a pilgrimage to the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem while she was still a prostitute. As she tried to enter the church to venerate the

relic of the holy cross, an invisible force pushed her back. In the courtyard outside, she confronted an icon of the Virgin Mary, to whom she promised to repent of her sins if she would be allowed to enter. She converted immediately, entered the church, and then returned to Egypt, where she lived as a holy hermit until her death.[16](#)

A last example comes from John of Ephesus's *Ecclesiastical History*, written sometime in the late sixth century. According to this story, a certain Anatolius, a deputy prefect of Antioch, had set up an icon of Christ in his home, hoping that he could fool people into believing he was a pious Christian. Unfortunately, when he invited some guests to view it, it miraculously turned itself to the wall. Anatolius turned it back, but it turned again. This went on several times, until it must have been practically spinning. Finally, investigators were called in, who examined the object closely and found a portrait of Apollo on the back, so skillfully painted as to be nearly invisible to casual observers. As soon as this was discovered, they threw the panel to the ground and trampled on it. Anatolius was then arrested, tortured, subjected to wild beasts in the circus, and ultimately crucified.[17](#)

SAINTS' PORTRAITS AS HOLY RELICS

Although images are materially different from relics, they share some of the same qualities. Relics and icons are both devotional aids. Even though both are inert, earthly

objects, their devotees believe them to mediate contact with their living and heaven-dwelling models. The physical remains of saints' bodies create tangible links to their transcendent souls. An icon does the same by representing the saint's corporeal appearance. They have the same purpose but function by different modalities.

Not long before portraits emerged in Christian art, the cult of relics had quickly become a central aspect of the cult of saints. Although some scholars have dated the beginnings of the Christian relic cult to the third century, noting in particular the reverence of Saint Polycarp's followers for his body, his story mentions neither fragmentation nor dispersal of his remains for the express purpose of their veneration.^{[18](#)} Moreover, the dating and authenticity of this text have presented some significant problems to modern historians.^{[19](#)}

The earliest certainly dated textual reference to veneration of a saint's bodily relic appears in the mid-fourth century, in Optatus of Milevis's account of Lucilla, the African matron who carried the bone of a martyr with her to church and kissed it before receiving communion.^{[20](#)} Although Optatus regarded this incident as an outrage and placed it at the inception of the Donatist controversy at the start of the fourth century, he composed his treatise against the Donatist bishop Parmenian only sometime after 363.^{[21](#)} Bitterly opposed to Donatism, he may have exaggerated or invented his story, but whatever the circumstances, it must have been plausible to his audience at the time.^{[22](#)}

A more historically certain and roughly contemporaneous case involves the multiple transfers of Saint Babylas's remains. They were first carried from a cemetery outside Antioch to a shrine at nearby Daphne at the instigation of the caesar Constantius Gallus, then brought back to Antioch around 351 on the order of the emperor Julian, and finally returned to Daphne shortly after Julian's death. Recounted by a number of ancient authors, including John Chrysostom, the pagan historian Ammianus Marcellinus, and the fifth-century Christian historians Rufinus, Theodoret, and Sozomen, this constant shifting provoked a mysterious explosion that consumed the both Temple of Apollo and his statue at Daphne.^{[23](#)} The evident power of the saint's body prompted Julian's decision to move his remains back to Antioch.

Other evidence for dating the emergence of the cult of relics to the mid-to-late fourth century includes the ambitious program undertaken by Pope Damasus (r. 366–84) to locate and monumentalize the tombs of the Roman martyrs and Ambrose's consecrating his Milan basilica with the remains of the newly discovered bodies of the military martyrs Saints Gervasius and Protasius in the 380s.^{[24](#)} Gregory of Nyssa's *Encomium on Saint Theodore*, probably delivered around the same time, mentions pilgrims making contact with Theodore's coffin to receive blessings and even taking away dirt from his tomb.^{[25](#)} Finally, Victricius of Rouen's famous treatise *On the Praise of Saints*, in which he commends the veneration of relics, dates to the 390s.^{[26](#)}

The appearance of the relic cult shortly before the emergence of saints' portraits is part of what scholars often refer to as Christianity's material turn.²⁷ This transition was characterized by the incorporation of material elements in pious practices, including the increasingly popular pilgrimages to sacred places (especially sites associated with some event in Christ's life) and the discovery and dissemination of relics of the true cross. The almost simultaneous emergence of the cult of relics, holy portraits, and the identification of holy places does not appear coincidental: all three reflect a growing desire for some kind of material connection with Christ or a saint. Moreover, sacred sites were augmented with material artifacts, including icons. Setting up saints' portraits in the shrines that housed their remains allowed icons and relics to function together as foci for pious veneration. Those fourth-century Christian bishops and poets (e.g., John Chrysostom, Gregory of Nyssa, Prudentius) whose sermons or verses described martyria that were enhanced with depictions of the martyrs' trials clearly believed that the iconography complemented the shrines and enlivened their audiences' imaginations. Meanwhile, reading out martyrs' acts became a regular component of homilies and almost as prominent a part of the liturgy as the proclamation of scripture.²⁸

A few surviving artifacts bear material witness to this combination of relics and saints' portraits. One fourth-century instance appears in a small relic shrine in a private

house believed to have been owned by the Christian senator Pammachius, now beneath the Roman Basilica of Giovanni and Paolo. The wall paintings that surround what seems to have been a niche for relics presumably depict the saints venerated there.²⁹ The images to the right and left of the niche probably represent Saints John and Paul, while the adjacent walls display scenes of the executions of their companions (Crispus, Crispianus, and Benedicta). Immediately below the relic opening is the image of a male saint standing in the prayer pose. At his feet are two kneeling figures, perhaps Pammachius and his wife, Paulina.³⁰

Gradually, the portraits of saints, sometimes joined by Christ or the Virgin Mary, also adorned tombs of the ordinary dead, probably an adaption of the practice of seeking burial *ad sanctos*, near the remains of a saint, which many faithful thought would help them attain a blessed afterlife. For example, a fourth-century painting set over the tomb of a woman named Veneranda in the Catacomb of Domitilla depicts Saint Petronilla, often identified as Saint Peter's daughter, escorting Veneranda into paradise (see fig. 7.2). The medium of aid is not the image, however, but rather Saint Petronilla's nearby remains. A fifth-century fresco in a chamber of the Catacomb of San Gennaro in Naples displays a portrait of Saint Januarius standing between two flaming candles with his hands raised in prayer (see fig. 7.3). His halo encircles a Christogram, and two tau crosses to his left and right

accompany the dedicatory inscription “Sancto Martyri Ianuario.” Although Januarius’s relics were deposited in this Neapolitan catacomb, the bodies buried in this particular chamber are those of the two figures shown with him: a child, Nicatiola, and a woman, Cominia.[31](#)



FIGURE 7.2 Saint Petronilla leading Veneranda into paradise, Catacomb of Domitilla, Rome, fourth century. (From G. Wilpert, *Roma sotterranea: Le pitture della catacombe romane* [Rome: Desclée, Lefebvre, 1903], tav. 213.)



FIGURE 7.3 Saint Januarius, from the Catacomb of San Gennaro, Naples, fifth century. (Photo: ©DeA Picture Library / Art Resource, NY.)

An early sixth-century votive painting from Rome's Catacomb of Commodilla depicts Mary and Christ themselves. The enthroned Virgin and the Christ child in her lap are at the center of the composition, while two saints, Adauctus and Felix, stand to either side of them (see

fig. 7.4). A smaller figure on the left approaches the Virgin with her hands veiled in a gesture of reverence. The accompanying dedication identifies her as Turtura and praises her faithfulness to her dead husband by likening her to the turtledove, which mates for life. Saint Adauctus's right hand rests on Turtura's shoulder as if presenting or commending her to the Virgin. Because tradition places the tombs of Saints Felix and Audauctus (martyred during the Great Persecution) in this catacomb, their presence in the image indicates their roles as Turtura's intercessors or sponsors, assisted by the proximity of their physical remains.[32](#)



FIGURE 7.4 Fresco of the Virgin Mary and Christ child, saints, and patron, Catacomb of Commo- dilla, Rome, ca. 528. (Photo: Scala / Art Resource, NY.)

RITUAL AND DEVOTIONAL PRACTICES

The pious rituals that sprung up around holy portraits have some notable parallels to those concerning relics. Early critics regarded such treatment as scandalously similar to

pagan practices. Irenaeus and the *Acts of John* mention such controversial conduct as setting up images of Christ or saints on altars, honoring them with lit tapers and burning incense, and crowning them with garlands. Some of this is reflected in the pictorial record. The portrait of Saint Januarius in the Naples catacomb and the lid of the Capsella Africana, a silver reliquary in the Vatican Museum, both depict their martyred subjects standing between two tall, burning candles.

The first recorded case of kissing relics may be Optatus's account of Lucilla's behavior discussed above. Another early mention comes from the diary of the fourth-century Jerusalem pilgrim Egeria, who described the faithful kissing the wood of the cross on Good Friday.^{[33](#)} Jerome also reported instances of kissing both tombs and relics.^{[34](#)} He even wrote of the Roman matron Paula, "As she entered the tomb of the resurrection, she kissed the stone that the angel had rolled away from the sepulcher's door, and with a faith like someone desperately thirsty for water, she even licked the very place where the Lord's body had lain."^{[35](#)} Toward the end of the fourth century, a Gallican priest named Vigilantius expressed his disgust at devotees who, he says, wrapped up bits of dust in precious cloth, kissed them, and carried them ceremoniously into church, where they were surrounded by burning candles.^{[36](#)}

The kissing of icons probably appeared significantly later than the kissing of relics, but it gradually became customary. One of the earliest extant textual references to

the practice comes from the transcript of a contentious theological dispute between Maximus the Confessor and Theodosius of Caesarea in 656, which ended happily, with each of them kissing icons of Christ and the Virgin Mary.^{[37](#)} In time, like relics, certain icons were credited with effecting miracles of various kinds, from healing affliction and defending against enemy invasion to more intimate wonders such as speaking or emitting oil, blood, sweat, or tears.^{[38](#)}

Relics and icons are also similar in how they are produced and replicated. Although bodily relics are unique and derive from a single source (the saint's remains), they are endlessly divisible. The tiniest bit of bone, fragment of tooth, or strand of hair has as much power as an entire sanctified body. They may also generate contact relics, produced simply by touching the original with bits of cloth (*brandea*) or passing oil over it into small containers (*eulogia*).^{[39](#)} Sometimes the dust or soil from the area around or inside a saint's tomb suffices as a contact relic. For example, Augustine tells the story of some earth (*terra sancta*) brought from Jerusalem that a certain farmer named Hesperius hung up in his bedroom. The dirt was so powerful that it healed his entire family, his livestock, and his servants of demonic possession.^{[40](#)}

Icons are also replicable, although in a different sense. Portraits of saints can be produced infinitely without any diminution of their representational capacity, because their authenticity is based on an artist's faithful copying of a

model. Moreover, only rare examples are claimed to be originals made from life or by supernatural means (e.g., the Mandylyon of King Abgar). According to the legend associated with it, the sixth-century Kamoulia icon of Christ was originally produced when his image appeared on a linen cloth miraculously floating in a pool of water and was transferred to another linen cloth which covered it. It was copied and distributed more times, and the copies were accorded equal reverence to the original and even continued to be referred to as *acheiropoietos* (not made by human hands).[41](#)

Both icons and relics are also portable. They can be moved, given as gifts, or worn on the body. Some are large or permanently installed in altars or on the walls of churches, but many are intimate, personal, and small enough to be carried in the hand.[42](#) Occasionally, the distinction between icon and relic blurs, as with the small tokens bearing the saint's image that were made from dirt taken from beneath the columns of Simeon and Daniel Stylites.[43](#)

The most obvious differences between icons and relics are that relics are not *visual* depictions of a saint and sight is not the primary way in which they are encountered. Relics are oriented to other senses—especially touch. In fact, they are usually not visible at all, as they tend to be encased in closed containers (i.e., reliquaries), although they are occasionally displayed to the faithful. Those who come to venerate them must trust that they are indeed

present inside their opulent little boxes or crystal cases. Thus, ironically, while relics are definitively sensible and corporeal, most encounters with them are not; they rely more on spiritual than on sensual perception.

The emergence of the relic cult perhaps preceded the appearance of portraits of Christ and the saints by a decade or two. Both offer tactile and visual means of engendering contact with the object of the devotee's veneration. Furthermore, images and relics were often jointly amplified by poetic descriptions of the saint's heroic deeds in life and subsequent miracles effected from the heavenly realm. These gave both images and relics a context and a purpose. By the early Middle Ages, image and relic had become even more closely linked, as relics were inserted into images and reliquaries were fashioned to resemble some part of the saint's body.⁴⁴ In certain instances, figural images on reliquaries or the fact that relics were enclosed in images both confirmed and extended the links between images and relics.

OTHER MEDIATING IMAGES

Relics and holy portraits are not the only instances of mediating images or objects in Christian practice. Other kinds have been the focus of sacred or "ritual-centered viewing" within a specifically designed context or particular religious rite that has the express purpose of generating an epiphanic encounter.⁴⁵ One example of this,

another late fourth- and early fifth-century development, was the rise of devotion to the real presence of Christ in the sanctified eucharistic bread and wine.⁴⁶ An aspect of this devotion is visually attending to those consecrated elements even before receiving them. This is evident in the late fourth-century church order known as the Apostolic Constitutions, which refers to the bishop's elevating the host while intoning the words "Holy things for holy persons" prior to the distribution of communion, the phrase almost certainly intended to prompt the congregants' reverent gazes.⁴⁷

Instructions for visually reverencing the eucharistic elements appear in a number of catechetical homilies, including those in the *Mystagogical Catecheses*, attributed to Cyril of Jerusalem and probably delivered sometime in the 380s.⁴⁸ As Cyril prepared his catechumens for their first eucharist following baptism, he explained that immediately after the congregation recited the Lord's Prayer, the presider would intone, "Holy things to the holy."⁴⁹ The bishop assured his listeners that the bread which is seen and tastes like bread is not bread but the body of Christ, and the wine, though it looks and tastes like wine, is not wine but the blood of Christ.⁵⁰ Then he instructed the expectant communicants in how to receive. They should cup their hands as if making a throne for a king and consume the holy body after sanctifying their eyes with it and taking great care not to drop any crumbs. After receiving the bread, communicants should take the cup in a

reverent manner and, with the wine still on their lips, touch the cup to sanctify their eyes, forehead, ears, and nostrils.^{[51](#)} Around the same time, Bishop Theodore of Mopsuestia told his candidates for baptism that they should lovingly receive the sacred body by pressing it against their eyelids and kissing it. The prayers they offered at that moment would be to Christ as if he were immediately and personally present.^{[52](#)}

These texts, although imprecise about how the sacred elements were materially transformed, clearly indicate that they had become objects of devotion, to be seen as much as tasted and consumed. And while the eucharist is not simply a symbol or representation but a reality in a sense that painted or sculpted icons are not, the conviction that ordinary material can mediate and even *be* the divine presence at least parallels the belief that certain types of visual images have a similar (if somewhat less) sacred or powerful capacity.

THE EMPEROR'S IMAGE

A different kind of parallel to how Christians in the fourth century perceived saints' icons is how those in the post-Constantinian era regarded portraits of the reigning emperor. Historians have long noted that, like cult images of gods, rulers' portraits were believed to signify and even mediate the presence of those depicted.^{[53](#)} As a core aspect of the Greco-Roman imperial cult, such objects were often

treated as if they were the subject him- or herself: ceremonially welcomed into a city, addressed with flattering speeches, entertained with music and dancing. Ruler's portraits were even said to be capable of working miracles.⁵⁴ At the very least, the imperial likeness acted as a kind of proxy, commanding a degree of fearful respect as it presided over judicial hearings, dispensed clemency, and accepted gifts or sacrifices. At most, the portrait would be accorded all the honors and privileges that would have been extended to the emperor himself. Severian of Gabala justified the practice around 400: "Since an emperor cannot be present to all, it is necessary to set up the image [τὸν χαρακτῆρα] of the emperor in courts of law, marketplaces, assemblies, and theaters. Therefore, in every place in which a governor acts, [the image] must be present in order that what takes place may be confirmed. For the emperor, as a human, cannot be everywhere, but God, as it accords divinity, can be."⁵⁵

The trials of many Christian martyrs appear to have been attended by imperial images. A letter from Pliny the Younger to Trajan mentions that imperial portraits were brought in as witnesses in one such case, and the story of the Asian martyr Apollonius (d. ca. 185) refers to the proconsul's demand that the martyr offer veneration to the emperor Commodus's icon.⁵⁶ Such a practice is depicted in an illumination in the sixth-century Rossano Gospels, which shows an imperial portrait at Jesus's trial by Pontius Pilate (see fig. 7.5).



FIGURE 7.5 The trial of Christ before Pontius Pilate, from the Rossano Gospels, sixth century, now in the Biblioteca Arcivescovile, Rossano, Italy. (Photo: Scala / Art Resource, NY. ART34014.)

According to a law in the Theodosian Code, promulgated by Theodosius I, Valentinian, and Arcadius, persons who sought sanctuary at the site of imperial statues would be granted asylum.⁵⁷ By contrast, desecration or even disrespectful treatment of an imperial image could bring

harsh consequences. The *Historia Augusta* reports an incident when men were put to death for urinating on statues or busts of the emperor Caracalla.⁵⁸ Even the Christian bishop Basil of Caesarea warned that whoever insulted the imperial image insulted the emperor himself.⁵⁹ Similarly, Ambrose remarked, “Whoever crowns the emperor’s image thereby honors the one whose image he has crowned, and whoever shows contempt to the emperor’s statue is judged to do injury to the emperor whose image he scorned.”⁶⁰

Gregory of Nazianzus acknowledged that it was customary to honor imperial portraits but protested the emperor Julian’s habit of associating his with those of pagan gods, thus trapping his Christian subjects into either falling into idolatry or offending him by refusing the respect due to his image.⁶¹ Yet at least one theologian objected to the practice. In his *Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, Jerome contrasts his contemporaries to the three Hebrew youths, who refused to bow down to Nebuchadnezzar’s statue: “Therefore let judges and princes who worship the statues of emperors or idols realize that they are doing precisely the thing which the three youths refused to do and thereby pleased God. And we should observe the proper significance of the issue involved: they assert that worshipping the mere image is equivalent to serving the false gods themselves, neither of which things is befitting to the servants of God.”⁶² Depictions of the three youths refusing to worship an

image of the Roman emperor (instead of Nebuchadnezzar's statue) appear in early Christian catacomb paintings and sarcophagus reliefs (see fig. 7.6).[63](#)



FIGURE 7.6 Three youths and emperor with a bust of the emperor above, relief from the sarcophagus of Catervius and Severina, Cathedral of San Catervo, Tolentino, Italy, fourth century. (Photo: Jim Forest; used with permission.)

Despite the fact that many Christian martyrs had gone to their deaths for refusing to offer sacrifice to imperial portraits, fourth- and fifth-century church authorities evidently saw no problem with venerating images of the Roman emperors, probably at least partly because these rulers were now Christians rather than polytheists.[64](#) The

threat of idolatry apparently did not apply if the person depicted ostensibly understood what was at stake.

A particularly vivid example of this comes from a chapter of an anonymous document possibly written by a Christian monk sometime around the early fifth century. The work, *Questions from a Pagan to a Christian*, recounts a discussion between the Christian Zacchaeus and a pagan philosopher named Apollonius.^{[65](#)} The pagan pointedly asks why Christians, who claim to abhor idolatrous veneration of statues, nevertheless willingly reverence images of the emperor. The Christian replies that his coreligionists do not regard the emperor as a divine being but simply show him appropriate honors. He adds that if the veneration borders on the extreme, it clearly should be curbed by church authorities and even the rulers themselves would wish to discourage it. For instance, he notes, the emperor Theodosius II limited excessive honors to imperial images, arguing that while they were exhibited to represent the emperor's presence and duly receive praise, vainglorious show on public occasions was inappropriate and acts of worship should be accorded only to the Supreme Deity.^{[66](#)}

More than just allowing the veneration of imperial images, some fourth-century Christian theologians perceived them as offering a useful way to think about the identity of the Divine Son and the Father. Athanasius of Alexandria, for example, interpreted the passage from the Gospel of John that quotes Jesus as saying, "Whoever has

seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9), by analogy to the emperor and his image:

In the image is the shape and form of the Emperor, and in the Emperor is that shape which is in the image. For the likeness of the Emperor in the image is exact; so that a person who looks at the image, sees in it the Emperor; and he again who sees the Emperor, recognizes that it is he who is in the image. And from the likeness not differing, to one who after the image wished to view the Emperor, the image might say, ‘I and the Emperor are one; for I am in him, and he in me; and what you see in me, that you behold in him, and what you have seen in him, that you behold in me.’ Accordingly, he who worships the image, in it worships the Emperor also; for the image is his form and appearance. Since then the Son too is the Father’s Image, it must necessarily be understood that the Godhead and propriety of the Father is the Being of the Son.^{[67](#)}

In his anti-Arian treatises, Basil of Caesarea similarly illustrates the relation of the Father to the Divine Word with this imperial parallel. Writing against Sabellians, he explains that the Son is the true Image of the Father and an image that possesses an identical nature to that of the Father. To illustrate his argument, Basil points to the common belief that the emperor’s image is the emperor—there are not two emperors—although he allows that the corruptible imperial image is not comparable to the incorruptible Divine Image. Nevertheless, he holds that to adore the emperor’s image is to adore the emperor, and while he does not directly affirm the practice, he takes it as a given.^{[68](#)} In his treatise *On the Holy Spirit*, Basil poses the following question: how can it be, if the two Divine Persons are distinct, that we do not speak of two Gods? His answer

partly draws upon the shared identity between the emperor and the emperor's image: "The power is not divided, nor the glory separated. One is the dominion and authority over us; we do not send up *glories* to God, but glory; the honor given the image passes to the prototype."⁶⁹

Despite using the identity of the emperor and his image as an analogy for two of the Trinity's Divine Persons, these theologians would have denied that the emperor and his portrait shared the same nature. This distinction of natures was clearly delineated even by the apostate Emperor Julian, who reigned from 361 to 363. As noted in chapter 1, in a fragment inserted into an epistle to the philosopher and statesman Themistius, Julian writes, "Therefore, when we look at the images of the gods, let us not indeed think they are stones or wood, but neither let us think they are the gods themselves; and indeed, we do not say that the statues of the emperors are mere wood and stone and bronze, but still less do we say they are the emperors themselves."⁷⁰

CONCLUSION

In the first three centuries CE, Christian critics judged polytheists' cult images to be idolatrous partly because they were made by human hands from material stuff. They were deceptive and potentially dangerous inanimate objects that could in no sense represent an invisible, incorporeal, and incomprehensible divine being. While

statues of gods seemed as if they could see, hear, or talk, they were, in fact, inert and insensible. Having no intrinsic power, they were unable to protect themselves from decay and destruction. Worse yet, demons might appropriate and inhabit them to manipulate credulous devotees. In alliance with non-Christian intellectuals, these critics scoffed at those who believed that divine or sacred power could be mediated through transitory and corruptible physical objects. At best, pictorial representations might be useful for prompting piety, instructing the unlettered, or adorning places of worship or burial, but they did not give access to the divine.

Throughout the fourth century and into the fifth, however, a remarkable development changed the way that Christians viewed the material world and its capacity for revealing or mediating holy or divine presence. Although Christian teachers had always insisted that God's creation is essentially good and that God's divine power and glory are revealed in nature and through historical events, they had also asserted that the transcendent divine being who is the source of all is essentially (by nature) distinct from creation. Yet around the mid-fourth century, Christian attitudes toward the sensible, physical world began to evolve, as earthly and bodily substances were newly perceived as bearing the potential to disclose the divine presence and even convey holy power. The invisible things that were earlier thought to be beyond comprehension or even imagination were now accessible through the medium

of material artifacts. Some of these objects demonstrated their intrinsic power or agency by facilitating miracles or being supernaturally made without human craft.

This evolution in Christian practice was less a total shift brought on by changing perspectives or attitudes than the adaptation and continuation of a long-standing ritualized activity in which the attentively engaged subject might encounter the holy presence with the assistance of a visual aid, be it a bodily relic, a consecrated eucharistic host, or a sacred portrait. Contemplation with the gaze of faith can render the unseen spiritually visible, if not physically so, and addresses the human desire to behold the divine face to face.

OceanofPDF.com

8

MATERIALITY, VISUALITY, AND SPIRITUAL INSIGHT

The eye is the lamp of the body. So if your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is not sound, your whole body will be full of darkness.

MATTHEW 6:22–23

Much of the discussion in the preceding chapters focused on questions of what constitutes idolatry and whether it is possible for a human agent to make an image of a divine being. These issues have several underlying ones: whether God can ever be seen by human bodily eyes, what might justify depictions of God in human form, by what standards portraits of Christ or the saints can be judged as true, whether certain human-made portraits might possess intrinsic power or independent agency by virtue of likeness to their model or some other constitutive aspect of their production, and finally how such images should be regarded and whether their treatment is comparable to

that of pagan cult images. The fact that Christ and the saints were once living human beings with external appearances (faces and bodies) might justify depictions of those appearances, yet one may ask whether such depictions are anything more than the imaginings of artists or received conventions. Apart from those icons that purport to be the product of visions or miracles, images that claim to be “true likenesses” rarely insist that they are how Christ or any long-dead saint looked in life.

While these questions all revolve around the possibility, suitability, fashioning, and treatment of sacred images, a more fundamental issue is their materiality. Distinct from the problem of whether visual representation of the divine is even possible, the products are physical artifacts, shaped, carved, or produced by other means from destructible, malleable, unstable, and insensate substances (wood, paint, stone, metal, ivory, etc.). Although the viewer may regard the experience of seeing or, later, recalling the image as dematerialized and ephemeral, the original thing viewed is undoubtedly still a thing. Even if ritually consecrated, its substrate continues and remains subject to decay, destruction, and inhabitation by insects, rodents, or even demons. Thus, focusing only on how cult images were derived or what they depicted, early critics aimed their objections at these objects’ fabrication and substance. It seemed impossible that an image of a god manufactured by human hands from mundane substances could mediate an

encounter with its model, much less have any intrinsic power.

During the fourth century, however, Christians reassessed and even redeemed matter. This evolution is essential for understanding the transition from the condemnation of cult images as idols to their appreciation and acceptance as devotional aids and even miracle-working links to their models.

THE FOURTH-CENTURY MATERIAL TURN

In recent decades, historians have applied new methods and theories to the study of the material and visual dimensions of religious observance.¹ The roles that various kinds of objects, images, architectural spaces, and geographical places play in forming concepts about the divine realm and its degree of accessibility to human perception are now significant subjects of academic investigation.² A crucial development in fourth-century Christian practice, often referred to as the material turn, evinces a change in attitude that reconsidered the potential of the external, sensible world to mediate invisible, spiritual, and divine realities. This development, what one scholar calls a “shift in . . . sensibility,” especially credited the senses as reliable faculties for approaching or encountering the sacred.³

Philosophical speculation about the relationship of form to matter—influenced by Aristotelian philosophy, which

insists that form cannot exist without matter (or soul without body)—was essential to early Christian doctrine about the goodness of creation and, in particular, the possibility of bodily resurrection. Nevertheless, the observable changeability and corruptibility of material things raised doubts about their worthiness. Platonist assertions that the sensible world is transient and that the identity and value of physical objects derive from their timeless and transcendent prototypes underlie Christian denigration of cult images as futile and misguided. As Athenagoras remarked, those who venerate images constructed from matter and thus regard matter as divine do not distinguish God from matter or discern the enormous distance between them. By contrast, he insisted, Christians do not mistake the created for the uncreated or being for nonbeing, and therefore they refuse to put that which is perishable on the same plane with that which is eternal.^{[4](#)}

Thus, early Christian apologists apparently found little—if any—religious significance in objects fabricated by human hands from tangible material. Although archeological evidence shows that second- and third-century Christians owned and used special buildings, vessels, books, and even pictorial art in their religious practice, they did not regard these as conduits for the holy, even if they did not judge them to be idolatrous. Similarly, while Christians undoubtedly believed in the intercessory power of the saints by the mid-third century, they began to

venerate saints' bodily remains only around the mid-fourth. Some textual evidence indicates that the impulse to reverently bury and honor martyrs' bodies already existed earlier, but the conviction that they could be collected, fragmented, transported, and even the focus of petitionary prayers developed only gradually.

The reevaluation of materiality was not a movement characteristic of Christianity alone. Beginning in the third century, Neoplatonic philosophy subtly but crucially altered the Platonic perspective on matter's worthiness. Although this later school of thought continued to regard matter as the lowest form of existence, it allowed that matter was nevertheless part of the realm of being and a basis for ascent toward higher reality. As a consequence, for those who espoused this philosophy, appreciation of the sacred led to appreciation of the material realm for its mediating potential.

As will be discussed below, these emerging attitudes had their detractors. To some minds, they essentially denied the crucial separation between the infinite, uncreated divine and the created, finite, and earthly. If God is utterly incomprehensible, how can God be accessed through the bodily senses—be seen or even grasped? To others, however, the belief that saints' relics or sacred portraits could be instruments for mediating the presence of their models was principally an affirmation that God condescends to be manifest through and in the creation.

This chapter examines some possible reasons for why rituals centered on material objects gradually became distinctive and widely celebrated parts of Christian practice. Modern historians have offered various theories, from the adoption of preexisting or contemporaneous parallels in late antiquity through the rise of doctrinal considerations that emphasized an incarnational transformation of physical reality in the coming of Christ to the marked change in Christians' sociocultural circumstances following the emperor Constantine's legalization of their faith and patronage of the church. Each of these suggestions has a degree of plausibility, but each also overlooks contradictory and challenging evidence, which the following discussion will address.

THE PERSISTENCE OF PAGAN PRACTICES

As noted at the outset of this book, certain past historians proposed that the appearance of Christian pictorial art was a consequence of the church's rapid expansion after the legalization of Christianity. According to this view, new converts were less fervent in their faith and took a laxer attitude toward the commandments or, out of a desire for more sensory forms of worship, simply imported their former pagan practices, such as image veneration, into their new religion.

This explanation echoes the judgment of the fourth-century Gallican priest Vigilantius of Caligurris, who considered the ways his contemporaries revered relics as

the equivalent of how pagans venerated images of their gods. To him, this was clear evidence that Christians were backsliding into pagan idolatry. Even his detractor Jerome admitted, albeit reluctantly, that Christian reverence for holy relics could look like idolatry.⁵

Vigilantius's perspective was shared by Protestant Reformers of the sixteenth century, as well as a number of eminent historians later on, even into recent decades. For example, the liturgical historian Theodor Klauser assumed that Christian material practices arose among ordinary folk who were influenced by their pagan environment and their simple desire for pictorial images but also may have belonged to one or another heretical group. By contrast, he proposed that theologically minded and biblically conscious opponents of images continued to repudiate them until the mid-fourth century but ultimately succumbed to pressure from layfolk.⁶

This idea that certain practices of Christians were much like those of their pagan neighbors has resonance with a more current thesis, that the two faiths differed more in appearance than in reality. For example, the historian Robin Lane Fox remarked on saints' shrines becoming "packed with works of art" like the older shrines of Aesclepius:

Yet these shrines were not merely "pagan" counterweights. They brought their own Christian piety to a continuing culture pattern, the "epiphanies" which still occurred to the unified human mind. In sickness or in sea storms, in moments of stress or sadness, Christians continued to "see" their "helpers," as pagans had also seen theirs. While Christians accepted the

pagans' experience and described it as demonic, they traced their own to God and his saints. In the past, Homer and religious art had enhanced what pagans saw; by the fifth century, the legends of the saints and an emergent portrait art were helping to focus the Christians' sense of a divine presence.⁷

A related scholarly assessment, also similar to Klauser's, characterizes the fourth-century turn toward more material forms of religious expression as reflecting the piety of uneducated laity, the nonelite, and women. In contrast to Klauser, those who advance this claim typically regard the development in a positive light, as it portrays these new types of devotional practices as belonging to certain marginalized groups rather than to the social and economic elite, who were more likely to be influenced by conservative ecclesial authorities. For example, Ramsay MacMullen suggests that the authorities tried to inhibit the cult of saints—with the possible exception of Jerome, who in his rebuttal of *Vigilantius* admitted that certain practices belonged to the ignorant, simpleminded laymen or to religious women.⁸ MacMullen distinguishes between church leaders and what he defines as the "95 per cent" who "clustered round the martyrs and gave such enormous vitality to the church's development" and were "obviously and inevitably different from the leadership"—like John Chrysostom, who reproached them for their "bad manners," described them as "shabbily dressed," and mocked them for speaking "bad Greek, or none at all."⁹

The historian Margaret Miles similarly connects the material turn and particularly the emergence of visual art

to the nonelite members of the Christian faithful. In her book *Image as Insight*, she draws researchers' attention to the value of treating pictorial art as equal to literary evidence as a primary scholarly resource. She argues that written texts largely reflect the beliefs of "a highly uncharacteristic historical person" and suggests that, by contrast, "visual images provide a history of the ways by which the nonprivileged understood and coped with physical existence." She continues, "Images can also reflect the discontinuity featured in women's physical existence; religious imagery delights in themes specific to the stages of women's life experience," then contrasts visual forms of expression, which she asserts are addressed more to comprehending bodily experience, with verbal discourse, which she associates with male intellectuals' focus on the history of ideas: "The universality of physical existence, articulated by images, is different from the universality of the subjective consciousness, articulated by language."¹⁰

Miles proposes a sociological distinction between female and male or privileged and underprivileged individuals' modes of comprehension, based on the character of their daily, physical existence. A far simpler analysis perhaps echoes the famous dictum of Gregory the Great in his two letters to the bishop of Marseille, which maintains the value of images as substitutes for writing: pictures can be Bibles for the unlearned.¹¹ This idea was repeated through the ages, by figures like the Venerable Bede, Bonaventure, and Thomas Aquinas, becoming nearly standard by the

time of John Calvin, who contemptuously referred directly to Gregory to refute it.¹² As Peter Brown states, in his influential essay "Pictures as a Substitute for Writing," Gregory's famous letters "have come to form the basis of all subsequent Western common-sense on the religious function of art."¹³

In this same essay, Brown refers to what he calls a "potent construct" in the writings of certain scholarly "giants," including MacMullen and the art historian Hugo Brandenburg, who believed that a distinct Christian pictorial language emerged as a tool for reaching out to and communicating with the nonliterate masses, who were "hitherto excluded" from "participation in the culture of the élites."¹⁴ He explains that he does not altogether agree with that construct and instead sees "the notion that images can act as a substitute for writing" as belonging to the end of late antiquity, so "it should not be projected backwards into the late antique period proper."¹⁵

Arguments that material aids to devotion, including pictorial art, were especially promoted by (or for) members of the lower classes assume an unnecessarily firm dichotomy between social groups that, despite their differences, inhabited a common culture. Moreover, claims that images were aimed at the unlearned or nonelite suppose that only women, children, and other the socially disadvantaged people appreciate pictorial art. A related presumption is that once someone learns to read, they no longer prefer images to texts. Against these

presuppositions is the obvious fact that most early Christian art objects (e.g., paintings, relief sculptures, mosaics, tapestries, carved ivories, precious metal objects, gems, gold glasses) were costly products commissioned largely by and for those who could afford them—a category that clearly included learned men. The patrons of artists' workshops and those who funded the decoration of churches in late antiquity were not the socially marginalized. Presumably, the viewers of Christian art were not only, or even primarily, the less privileged, less educated, or less language-oriented (and more bodily conscious) members of the community.

EMPHASIZING INCARNATION

Taking a different approach from those who see the shift toward a material sensibility within Christianity as a result of pressure from nonelites, many scholars have instead argued that it was prompted by a greater attention, in doctrinal treatises, homilies, and catecheses, to Christ's incarnation. This supposedly promoted a different way of thinking about the human body, in particular its capacity for divinization or fleshly resurrection. The resulting positive regard for the body could then be adapted to sacralize other things created by nature or human craft. As Patricia Cox Miller expresses it in *The Corporeal Imagination*, "spiritual seeing became more visceral due in part to the dignity accorded to the senses by a new understanding of the Incarnation."[16](#) By way of support,

she quotes P.W.L. Walker's observation that "the fourth century was a time when the Church, now more settled 'in the world,' began to reaffirm the proper value of the temporal," leading to "a greater appreciation of the Incarnation in the Church's life and thought." Walker further proposes that the incarnation allowed "a new attitude to physical matter," "a new approach to material objects and places," and "a new expectation that physical reality might in some way be important to the meeting between God and man." He concludes that "the Incarnation was a true legitimation of the physical realm."¹⁷ Miller underscores the idea, citing Georgia Frank, who agrees that "the Incarnation, in theory, legitimated all forms of sense perception as a means for knowing God."¹⁸

Without doubt, the incarnation was given as a theological justification for the veneration of holy icons by later writers, perhaps most prominently John of Damascus, whose eighth-century apologies for images insist that the incarnation of Christ made the invisible become visible and the infinite manifest in a finite form. In his first oration against iconoclasts, John famously wrote, "Of old, God the incorporeal and formless was never depicted, but now that God has been seen in the flesh and has associated with human kind, I depict what I have seen of God. I do not venerate matter, I venerate the fashioner of matter, who became matter for my sake and accepted to dwell in matter and through matter worked my salvation, and I will not cease from reverencing matter, through which my salvation

was worked.”¹⁹ However, we have no defense of icons or relics similar to John’s that is datable to the fourth century.

For example, although Jerome’s treatise *Against Vigilantius* advocates for the value and validity of relic veneration, he never gives Christ’s incarnation as its justification. Rather, he points to bishops’ offering the eucharistic sacrifice over the bones of saints and declares his own and others’ experiences of miracles and wonders at the tombs of martyrs.²⁰ Like Jerome, Victricius of Rouen (r. ca. 393–407) upheld the spiritual potency of saints’ bodily relics, but instead of citing Christ’s incarnation as justification, he maintained that all human bodies may share in Christ’s substance by virtue of baptism and that saints are raised to heaven because of their self-sacrifice and thus share in Christ’s crucifixion. Significantly, Victricius also asserts that relics derive their power from God’s grace and a fiery spirituality infused by the Word and not from any intrinsic property or nature.²¹ In other words, parts of created nature, particularly corporeal fragments from holy men and women, bear spiritual potency and even a kind of consubstantiality with God. However, this is by special divine favor.

Another problem with explaining the transition to veneration of material objects by asserting a new understanding of or greater appreciation for Christ’s incarnation is that it begs the question of how this teaching was new or greater than what came before. Certainly, Christians in earlier centuries also believed in the

incarnation. Paul asserts that God came in human form and with human flesh (Rom 8:3–4; Phil 2:5–8). He also speaks of the body as a locus for the Holy Spirit’s indwelling (1 Cor 3:16–17). Similar statements are found in the works of early postbiblical writers, among them Ignatius of Antioch (e.g., *Trall.* 10; *Phil.* 6). Most if not all of the early denouncers of pagan idols affirmed and taught Christ’s incarnation. Tertullian in particular wrote treatises affirming Christ’s human body (e.g., *On the Flesh of Christ*). He was also one of the earliest and strongest defenders of the bodily resurrection of the faithful (see, e.g., *On the Resurrection of the Flesh*)—unlike gnostic teachers or Manichaeans, he did not hold a generally negative view of created matter or the human body. He insisted only that things formed from that created matter not be worshiped or venerated for their own sake.

Athanasius of Alexandria’s treatise *On the Incarnation*, written in the first half of the fourth century, explains that Christ needed to appear in the flesh so that humanity could see and recognize the true God and stay away from false idols.²² It is less clear, though, that matter is therefore capable of mediating the divine. Athanasius’s argument is solely about Christ as incarnate. In fact, he expresses contempt for humans who reject eternal things and turn instead to corruptible ones, effacing their original image of God in so doing.²³ He echoes Paul’s letter to the Romans (1:20), declaring that God made works of creation to bring humans to perceive his glory, and so clearly upholds the

positive value of the senses to draw believers to God, but he views this as the result of humans fixing their attention on the incarnate Word and coming to realize that he is also God.[24](#)

This is not to say that Christ's incarnation is completely irrelevant to an explanation for the change of view toward materiality in the fourth century. It just is not apparent that a radically new—or distinctly fourth-century—view of the incarnation promoted a far more positive attitude toward the material creation than that held by many earlier Christian writers. It seems likely that many more factors contributed to what was undoubtedly a more affirming valuation of the material world and the bodily senses as instrumental means for encountering and comprehending the holy. One of these, discussed below, was Neoplatonic philosophy, which had an impact on the thinking of Christian teachers like Augustine.

THE EMERGENCE OF AN IMPERIAL CHURCH

The change in attitude toward materiality in the fourth century is sometimes attributed to the dramatic transformation in the social, economic, religious, and political status of Christianity in the Constantinian era. The coincidence of timing, along with Constantine's founding of major basilicas in Rome and identifying and constructing pilgrimage sites in Jerusalem, clearly prompted the enrichment of other built spaces for Christian worship. Perhaps the incorporation of more visual and tactile

elements into the formal liturgical ceremonials at that time is significant, but whether an unprecedented valuation of material elements in Christian ritual can be directly linked to Constantine's actions is not easily established. However, some historians clearly see the connection, including Joan Taylor, who argues that "Constantine brought to Christianity a pagan notion of the sanctity of things and places" and that "suddenly, with Constantine, the Church began to focus on the earth; the divine substance intermixed with certain material sites and resided in things which could be carried about."²⁵

While Taylor does not elaborate on how or why Constantine did this, other commentators, like Susan Ashbrook Harvey, offer some analysis. Harvey suggests that the dramatic transition from a persecuted religion at the beginning of the fourth century to one that was state sanctioned by the beginning of the fifth would have produced a new "institutional identity," in which "a changed sensibility came to dominate Christian expression in its various forms." She continues, "As Christianity laid increasing claim to social and political power, the church also showed increasing emphasis on claiming the physical world as a realm of positive spiritual encounter through the engagement of physical experience. In this changed situation, the sensory qualities of Christian piety bloomed. The Christian's religious experience in ritual, art, and devotional piety, previously austere in their sensory

aspects, became in the post-Constantinian era a feast for the physical senses.”²⁶

Harvey here specifically connects the practice of pilgrimage, the elaboration of liturgical ceremonial, and the cult of relics with “the flowering of church art and architecture on a monumental scale.”²⁷ Her basic argument is that during the fourth century, Christians moved out of a hostile culture, where they were socially marginalized and persecuted and which they regarded as basically idolatrous, into one that affirmed their faith and was eagerly engaged by most. Not only did they become producers and consumers of art, but they also came to believe that the external, sensible world is capable of containing and conveying the divine presence. This, however, is more an assertion of what happened than an explanation for why Christians, once they were able to practice their faith without fear, would naturally and consequently begin to see the physical world as a positive site for spiritual encounter. While it is fair to say that most did, plenty—including those who practiced ascetic disciplines—clearly did not.

Although its fourth-century political and social legitimization was a watershed moment for the church, the increasing size and wealth of the Christian community, along with the emperor’s patronage, likely provided only the means and not the whole basis for this rapid blossoming of material forms of Christian practice. Moreover, this did not happen suddenly, and certainly not

overnight. Well before Constantine came to power, Christians were already painting the walls of their churches and burial places. Wealthier members of the community were commissioning elaborately sculpted sarcophagi. Ordinary objects of daily use were adorned with Christian symbols and biblical characters. A cult of saints, if not necessarily of their bodily relics, existed by the mid-third century. Pilgrims were already visiting the saints' burial places and sharing ritual meals with them on their feast days. While Robert Markus insists that the development of pilgrimage to holy places "in the 320s and 330s was something quite new," he also points to "the ancient practices of venerating and visiting the burial places of the martyrs," which he describes as an "old practice, long accepted among Christians," which "came to warrant the new and suspect practice" and even "to reinforce it."²⁸

Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony's temperate analysis of Constantine's building projects in the Holy Land seems more broadly applicable: "It would be naive to think that such a radical change in religious perceptions and practices—an obvious departure from the New Testament's stance on sacred space—could have occurred 'suddenly' and as a result of the work of one man, emperor and 'friend of the all-sovereign God' though he might have been."²⁹ The church's increasing security, wealth, imperial patronage, and population were certainly supporting factors in the ability of Christians to make and own material objects for their corporate liturgical ceremonies

and private devotional practices, yet these do not, by themselves, explain the change in how they perceived or valued the sensible, material world.

Therefore, one may reasonably conclude that Constantine's support for the church was to some degree instrumental in prompting Christians to identify sacred places and to build and adorn churches, but it seems less clear that this explains or is even directly linked to a growing attribution of spiritual potential to material objects, such as saints' images. In fact, little in any of Eusebius's descriptions of Constantine's building projects, even his construction of the shrine of the Holy Sepulcher as described in the *Life of Constantine*, would lead one to suspect that the emperor held particular reverence for such items.³⁰ What appears more likely is that the growing appreciation for sacred materiality emerged in tandem with Constantine's benefactions to the church and not because of them.

Nevertheless, whether a popular desire for more tangible or visible aspects of Christian worship prompted the development of forms of material mediation or vice versa, the patronage of the emperor and other wealthy benefactors allowed Christians to move their corporate celebrations from more modest structures into monumental and lavishly decorated buildings. Simultaneously, the church's liturgy became more visually elaborate and sensually appealing. Perhaps Christianity's growing wealth, political security, and social acceptance alongside the

relatively rapid conversion of former polytheists raised the expectation that Christian worship should be more like pagan spectacles.^{[31](#)}

Among the new furnishings of churches were purposefully designed altars, bishops' thrones, baptismal fonts, and pulpits. According to one prominent liturgical historian, Alexander Schmemmann, these developments were in the service of evangelization—converting polytheists by accommodating their religious sensibilities. Whereas the pre-Constantinian churches and the liturgies celebrated within them were simple, the fourth-century shift to what he describes as “external solemnity” created an “atmosphere of sacred and religious fear” that was able to replace the sacred rites of the pagan cult. Moreover, the liturgy adopted elements from the imperial court, including the solemn entrance of the clergy in their rich vestments, accompanied by lit tapers and wafting incense. In Schmemmann's view, the official recognition of Christianity as licit allowed and even prompted such adaptations:

From the missionary viewpoint—with the attraction of the “masses” as an objective—it even seemed useful now to borrow from paganism everything that could be borrowed without distorting the basic meaning of the Christian faith. Moreover, we probably should not regard the pagan cults as the main source for this new outer solemnity of Christian worship, but rather the Imperial court ceremonial, which was religious in character and was a typical feature of the Hellenistic monarchies. This Imperial liturgy was more “admissible” for the Church than the pagan ceremonies, in view of the miraculous recognition of the Roman monarchy in the person of Constantine on the day of the fateful battle near the Ponte Molle. . . . Finally, the complication and development of the “material” side of the cult . . . must also

be explained at least partially by this court influence.^{[32](#)}

Alongside this material and visual enrichment of worship was the analogous development in sacramental theory that stressed the real presence of Christ in the eucharistic elements of bread and wine. While earlier Christian teaching about the eucharistic species often declared them to be the Lord's body and blood, beginning in the fourth and continuing into the early fifth century they received a new kind of attention as materially transformed, allowing the elements to be venerated independently and not only as part of the liturgical celebration of the sacred meal, as discussed in chapter 7. Paul Bradshaw and Max Johnson classify this as "the period of construction for the great classic eucharistic anaphoras," the rites in which a transformation of the elements is effected by the recitation of the words of institution or the invocation of the Holy Spirit.^{[33](#)}

BODILY SIGHT AND SPIRITUAL SIGHT

Whatever the reasons for its development, the new emphasis on materiality in the fourth century challenged theologians to rethink the power and place of the senses, particularly sight. One of the most adept of these, Augustine of Hippo, believed bodily sight to be inferior to intellectual perception, but he allowed that intellectual perception is activated by the physical process of viewing. He famously described seeing as analogous to touching:

the eye sends out a ray of light like a fingertip or a blind person's cane. Contrasting the speed of sight with the sluggishness of other bodily responses, Augustine explained that this ray can instantly travel enormous distances, even reaching the sun, just through the eye's opening and focusing.³⁴ In his treatise *On the Trinity*, he outlines three components involved in the act of seeing. The first is the outward appearance of an object, which exists even apart from its being seen. The second is sight itself, once the object is presented to the senses. The third is the viewer's conscious attention to the object.³⁵ Thus, he explains, sight does not only originate with the object or even with the eye's sensation but also requires the purposeful engagement of the seeing subject: it is the combined product of the object, the act, and the agent's intention. Once the object leaves the field of sight, its image is retained and stored in the mind or memory.

In another of his works, *On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis*, Augustine turns from the process of viewing to the three distinct and hierarchically ordered kinds of vision. He uses the commandment "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" to help make his argument. The first type of vision, "corporeal," is seeing things in the external world that meet the bodily eye. For example, one may read the words of the commandment or even see the neighbor in person. The second type of vision involves the memory of objects that are no longer present to our gaze and imagined things that we have never seen. This he labels

“spiritual vision” and illustrates with the neighbor when absent. The third and highest is the vision of things that have no precise likenesses and exist only in the mind but also give the whole process of seeing its ultimate meaning. Here he gives the example of love and labels this kind of vision “intellectual.”³⁶ As he elaborates his theory, Augustine explains that the three types of vision are progressive: one leads to the next, “and so, after the eyes have taken their object in and announced it to the spirit, in order that an image of it may be produced there, then, if it is symbolic of something, its meaning is either immediately understood by the intellect or sought out; for there can be neither understanding nor searching except by the functioning of the mind.”³⁷

Thus, for Augustine, physical objects and bodily sight are irreplaceable first elements in the visioning process, but for the viewer to comprehend the true meaning of an image it must be retained in the spirit and interpreted by the mind. Conscious and intentional contemplation of an object transforms its appearance from something that exists only in the transitory and external world into something that is stable, interior, and intelligible. Overall, Augustine argued that one must go beyond the visible object to perceive its invisible reality and thus understand its divinely instituted purpose. This changes the meaning of “seeing” altogether, insofar as it is not simply a means of acquiring knowledge of the sensible world but can lead beyond this to an epiphany of what is transcendent and invisible.³⁸ However,

seeing, as we know, does not inevitably lead to faith. As Augustine points out in his *Response to Simplician*, many witnessed Christ performing miracles, including raising the dead, but did not believe.³⁹ And although the thief on the cross recognized with whom he shared a death by crucifixion, Augustine allows that these kinds of epiphanic moments are not permanent or stable. In his *Confessions*, he describes his own coming to faith in the flash of a glance in which he understood the invisible divine nature, but he did not succeed in maintaining the vision, lacking the strength to keep his inner eye fixed on the revelation. Despite this, Augustine retained the memory of the experience and the desire that he might repeat it.⁴⁰

As discussed in chapter 3, in the last section of his *City of God*, Augustine argues that the resurrected will see with corporeal eyes but look upon only spiritual things. They will even behold God, either because the eyes possess an ability akin to that of the mind or because they will see only by means of the spirit. However they attain this beatific vision, they nevertheless will see with their bodily eyes.⁴¹ Thus, the goal of the Christian life is the attainment of a particular and exceedingly sacred kind of transcendent vision: an act of beholding at its most perfected and the fulfillment of the believer's deepest desire.

PARTICIPATION AND PRESENCE IN NEOPLATONISM

Augustine was far from the first to articulate the role of physical sight and the observation of external things in the world as an initial step in the process of attaining spiritual truth. One earlier philosophical theory of bodily sight was proposed by the Neoplatonist Plotinus (205–70), who combined the teachings of Plato, Aristotle, and even the Stoics into a system that had enormous influence on Christian thinkers. Augustine was more directly influenced, however, by the work of Plotinus's student Porphyry, who edited his teacher's collected treatises and titled them *Enneads*. Plotinus followed Plato in his cautious distrust of the senses and his judgment that physical matter is inferior to soul or mind. Yet he also allowed that images (including works of art) are useful guides or signs, able to assist the viewer's comprehension of higher realities. Thus, he granted visual images a somewhat positive value rather than understanding them simply as imitations of reality and likely to be flawed or misleading.^{[42](#)}

In *Ennead* 5, Plotinus addresses spiritual beauty and outlines his belief that observation of the beauty and structure of the natural world can lead viewers to appreciate that material things are reflections or images of invisible realities that are beyond bodily sight. In this way, mental perception initially relies on the sense of sight but then moves beyond the visible and externally attractive to internal and intelligible truths. Conscious attention leads step by step, up a kind of ladder, toward the eventual comprehension of the divine One. Yet all this begins with

bodily eyes attending to earthly beauty, and this gives matter a positive role in the viewer's ascent to internal and intelligible cognition. In Plotinus's system, while the material realm is both ontologically distinct and distant from the intelligible realm, matter originates and receives its form from the One and still possesses a divine spark, however dim.^{[43](#)}

To explain how viewers can grasp invisible realities, Plotinus proposes a resemblance between the object seen by the bodily eye and the Form that is known by the mind or soul. Those who gaze upon images, whether pictures or statues, may be prompted to recognize the unseen realities that they reveal. Thus, matter is an instrumental aid for the viewer to comprehend more than what the senses perceive. This is particularly true of art, which is given shape by human craft. In a famous comparison between worked and unworked stones, Plotinus praises the skill of the craftsman and regards the artist as the creator of the object and as such, superior to it. As he explains, raw stone is beautiful not by itself but only when it is changed by the one who works it: "The beauty was, therefore, in the craft, and it was far superior there."^{[44](#)} In this theory, matter, transformed into art, is intended not simply to imitate an object in the external world but rather to be an authentic image in that it is able to contain and disclose the reality or underlying truth of the model—the Form from which it takes its shape and the source from which it emanated.^{[45](#)} In other words, the beauty of an object is most fully known

by recognizing the inherent Form that it reflects and the power or skill with which it was created.

This theory unites idea with material. The first is superior to but nevertheless requires the second to be realized. In this sense, matter participates in Form and then mediates it. Viewers do not just see such objects but also encounter the origin of their appearance: the artist. Of course, the point is that because the Form is superior to the object, its inherent beauty draws viewers toward it, prompting them to leave the material thing behind while keeping the memory of the Form in mind and gradually rising above it to the elevated plane of intelligible reality, which is, in fact, both its source and its end. One thing leads to another in an upward trajectory of meaning making. However, the material is never completely abandoned or rejected as entirely bad, insofar as it is part of the process as the medium for the Form impressed upon it, like a mirror that catches the Form's image.^{[46](#)}

Thus, Plotinus allows that viewing a work of art, made from base matter by human hands, might initiate an epiphanic experience, so long as the viewer is drawn to the beauty of its originating Form and realizes the creative power of its source. Sense knowledge is the first step toward intelligible comprehension, since every artwork or other material object reflects the prematerial Form or principle in whose likeness it is fashioned, whether by nature or a person. If the spectator's gaze rises from contemplation of the lowest thing to the highest, the eye

that sees the external thing then prompts the soul to recognize and desire the eternal thing. Moreover, Plotinus adds that this would be impossible if the beautifully shaped object did not somehow share in the Supreme.^{[47](#)}

Added to this theory of participation is the principle of congruity. This principle appears in the work of the late fourth-century Neoplatonist practitioner and disciple of Porphyry Iamblichus of Calchis, who applied it to aspects of devotees' religious practices. For Iamblichus, like Plotinus, the object, image, or person shares a likeness with the idea (or the being), just as the portrait bears a likeness to its model. For him, however, this likeness is a matter not simply of external appearance but of the inculcation of virtue through righteous actions, in some instances including proper ritual performance.^{[48](#)} Also as in Plotinus, this likeness or affinity is the motivating force of stage-by-stage transcendence from lower to higher realities and binds the system together.^{[49](#)}

Iamblichus is also credited with an even higher appreciation of matter than that of his philosophical predecessors. Rather than essentially evil or simply base, he asserted that it is part of the Divine One's good creation and thus fully capable of mediating the presence of the gods, including in statues, temples, or other works of human craft. A god's mystical image, reflected in the human soul, is therefore linked to the god in the same manner as the god's name and assists in raising the soul to experience divine union.^{[50](#)} However, while appreciating

the mediatorial power of material things, Iamblichus disapproved of worshiping images. He denounced them as useless and lifeless, artificial and false, “infused only by an outward appearance of life, being held together externally by a contrived and many-shaped harmony, and wholly ephemeral.”⁵¹ Artists, he maintained, create not with some divine power but only with technical skill. He asked why anyone would exchange reality for images, thus descending from superior to inferior things. Yet he also claimed that while humans and not gods are the makers of images, the artisan’s skill nevertheless possesses some analogy to the divine Creator’s.⁵² He even argued that gods are appropriately worshiped by means of temples and statues.⁵³ Iamblichus judged these physical accoutrements to be necessary and divinely mandated as aids to theurgic rituals, such as sacrifices, prayers, and other things that humans do to encounter the gods.

In a treatise titled *On the Gods and the Cosmos*, Sallustius, another late fourth-century Neoplatonist and a friend of the emperor Julian and student of Iamblichus, explains the role of material components of religious practice:

All congruity comes about by representation and likeness; for which reason the temples are made in representation of heaven, the altar of earth, the images of life (that is why they are made like living things), the prayers of the element of thought, the mystic letters of the unspeakable celestial forces, the herbs and stones of matter, and the sacrificial animals of the irrational life in us.

From all these things the Gods gain nothing; what gain could there be to

God? It is we who gain some communion with them.⁵⁴

An external body or an icon is not itself an object of veneration; it is as different from its model as humans and gods are distinct. However, the model can guide the one who gazes upon it to the reality to which it bears likeness as its visible, material counterpart. For fourth-century Neoplatonists, then, visible things (e.g., statues, temples) aid devotees by directing them toward the invisible ones, as gradually developing consciousnesses ascend from the comprehensible to the incomprehensible. If one had nothing to see, insight would be thwarted.

Thus, for these thinkers, the principles of participation and congruity overcame the dualism that earlier systems asserted between the spiritual and material realms. Thus, matter was no longer utterly different from spirit but able to be a bridge to it—a visible sign or symbol of a transcendent and invisible reality. Porphyry judged that those who do not see beyond the physical object to discern its spiritual reality are like those who see written words and perceive only ink and paper but not the ideas they express.⁵⁵ Visualization is fundamental. Mental concepts are informed by images and stored in the memory as images. Therefore, cult images of gods or, for Christians, portraits of Christ and the saints are not only points of reference but effective instruments of spiritual insight.

CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY AND THE POWER OF SIGHT

The theories of fourth-century Neoplatonists may have indirectly yet significantly influenced how Christians thought about the role and power of images. Although the doctrine of Christ's incarnation affirmed the possibility of that which is sensible and mortal coexisting with what is immaterial and eternal, this was not the only or even the primary stimulus for new attitudes that regarded sacred images as proper objects of veneration. Christians had long taught the human and bodily incarnation, while Neoplatonist philosophers apparently did not need to believe in an incarnate divinity to posit objects and ideas along an inclusive, albeit graded, spectrum of existence. Such a scale did not mean that icons and their models or the gods and their statues were the same exact things or even shared identical natures. Clearly, with the exception of miraculously made icons, images were manufactured by human hands from physical stuff and, as such, were of an utterly different essence and occupied a distinct realm from what they portrayed. Yet these very distinct things were linked together, connected by virtue of the images' mediatorial likeness and activated by the theory of participation. The devotee engages this link insofar as he or she sees spiritually as well as physically and with the eyes of faith as well as with corporeal eyes.

The influence of Neoplatonism is evident in the works of thinkers both before and after Augustine. For example, the fourth-century Cappadocian Basil of Caesarea insisted on the ineffability of the Divine Being yet maintained that by

gazing at the beauty of an image one may distinguish the archetype. This, he said, accounts for the relationship of the Divine Word and God as that of image and prototype. Hence, whoever has a mental apprehension of the form of the Son can distinguish the image of the Father, beholding the unbegotten beauty through envisioning the Begotten. Basil saw the visioning process as initiated in the external realm and progressing to spiritual understanding and affirmed that while the physical and spiritual realms are not equivalent, they are inseparable.^{[56](#)}

The influence of Neoplatonism also shows up in the work of the sixth-century Syrian bishop commonly known as Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. In his *Mystical Theology*, this author presents the biblical figure of Moses as the prototype of the practitioner who desires to see God face to face and is initially granted an earthly manifestation of the divine but progressively ascends into a “cloud of unknowing,” as Moses did on Mount Sinai. He explains that those who want to emulate Moses must eliminate all ideas, descriptions, attributes, and names for God from their minds, since these fall short of the truth.^{[57](#)} Yet he also ascribes value to external or bodily vision as the first step on a ladder up to higher awareness. In another of his treatises, *On the Divine Names*, Pseudo-Dionysius describes the process by which a seeker proceeds in an anagogic fashion from the perceptible to the conceptual, ultimately arriving at the invisible: “On no account therefore is it true to say that we know God, not indeed in

His nature (for that is unknowable, and is beyond any reason and understanding), but by the order of all things that He has established, and which bears certain images and likenesses of His divine paradigms, we ascend step by step, so far as we can follow the way, to the Transcendent, by negating and transcending everything and by seeking the cause of all.”[58](#)

Thus, in the Pseudo-Dionysian system, images and symbols aid individuals in overcoming the gap between the material and heavenly realms. This movement is bidirectional: God condescends to persons just as they strive to ascend toward God—who, indeed, became human in the incarnation to redeem humans and restore their original divine likeness. In his treatise *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, Pseudo-Dionysius’s description of the ascent toward the divine seems very similar to Iamblichus’s theurgic practices: it is not simply intellectual (however necessary intellect may be to the process) but most of all effected through ritual actions. For Pseudo-Dionysius, this means the Christian liturgy, especially the sacraments of baptism and the eucharist.[59](#) For him, these are holy actions and symbols more than physical objects, however. Indeed, he rarely discusses the architecture, vestments, or ornaments of the church. Nevertheless, as one scholar has commented, he has been misunderstood as defending paintings and icons, even though his theories were usefully deployed by iconophiles in the later iconoclastic controversy.[60](#)

CONCLUSION

However influential fourth-century Neoplatonists were to later Christian theology of images or the theology of Pseudo-Dionysius was to the subsequent defense of saints' portraits and their veneration, arguments for a link between the external and sensible object and the transcendent and intelligible reality that it represents were central in changing Christian attitudes toward the representation of Christ and the saints in visual art. Prior to the mid-fourth century, Christians did not appreciably discern much, if any, religious value in the external, sensible world. But from then through the sixth century, the validity of the visible and the purpose of the sensible and material world became core to Christian belief and practices. Relics, sacred places, and saints' images were believed to link the earthly and heavenly realms, to mediate encounters with the holy, and even to perform miraculous healings or ward off both demons and human enemies. Gradually, Christians made a place for images in their devotional rituals and liturgical celebrations, thus enriching them with sensory experiences and accentuating their embodied dimension. They began to develop practices of spiritual seeing, training in not only what to see but how to see and move beyond external appearances to perceive higher spiritual realities. Most of all, now that they were producing their own holy icons, Christians no longer needed to worry that venerating images was intrinsically idolatrous. So long as these images depicted Christ or the

saints, they were not of the wrong or false gods. As much as these emerging observances might bear some similarities to earlier pagan ones, the theologically nuanced arguments in their defense, combined with the vigilance about any misunderstandings regarding their proper practice, allowed this gaze upon or contact with certain kinds of material objects to facilitate a mediated encounter with the sacred.

OceanofPDF.com

EPILOGUE

The Idols' Last Stand

By the late fourth century, Christian attitudes toward pagan gods' images had escalated from contempt and condemnation to seeking their removal or outright destruction. Of course, Christians were empowered by their secure political and social status then and no longer had to fear retaliation for their words or deeds in this regard. Imperial edicts, issued by Christian emperors from the time of Constantine forward, ordered the closure of temples, cessation of sacrifices, and confiscation, desecration, and smashing of cult statues.

Edicts are not always effective. In the end, the destruction was not altogether violent or comprehensive. According to the laws recorded in the *Codex Theodosianus*, most of these actions were to be carried out by secular officials in an orderly manner. Some images considered to have cultural value were even protected. However, documentary sources also record zealous bishops, groups of monks, and bands of Christian laity taking things into

their own hands. Although these assaults were sporadic and some reports may have been exaggerated, the surviving literature indicates that shifting power dynamics allowed anti-idol Christians to move beyond verbal ridicule to physical attacks.¹

Some assaults appear to have been spurred by a desire for retaliation. Certain martyrs' acts describe executions for refusing to venerate gods' images. For example, the Asian martyr Apollonius (d. ca. 185) rejected the governor's demand that he make a sacrifice both to the gods and to the image (*eikon*) of the emperor Commodus. Instead, he offered a disquisition on the foolishness of worshiping human-made idols, explaining that they are not only deaf, blind, and inert but merely portraits of dead human beings.² Similarly, the trial of Bishop Fructuosos of Tarragona and his companions (d. 259) included an exchange between them and the governor Aemelianus about whether the gods exist or not. It ended with the governor declaring that if the gods' images are not honored, then the emperor is dishonored.³ In a third example, the martyr Pionius compared his refusal to sacrifice to the witness of the three Hebrew youths' repudiation of Nebuchadnezzar's golden idol.⁴ Not all martyrs appear to have been asked to venerate pagan cult images, however. Many were punished simply for declaring their adherence to Christ or declining to eat sacrificial meat.

Some documentary evidence shows that certain Christians deliberately sought death by attacking pagan images. Although scholars debate its authenticity or would assign it a later date, one of the canons ostensibly from the early fourth-century Spanish Council of Elvira (c. 305–6) states that the Gospels never authorize destruction of idols and denies the title of martyr to anyone who was persecuted simply for assaulting one.⁵ This intentionally provocative behavior is recorded in the late fourth century and into the fifth. Around 390, Augustine exchanged letters with his old teacher Maximus, who still lived in Madauros, about an incident in which some Christians destroyed statues of Mars, the town's patron deity. Maximus, a staunch pagan, claimed that the perpetrators primarily wished that their outrages would prompt the gods' defenders to kill them in retaliation, thus gaining them glorious deaths as martyrs. Augustine responded that the church did not approve of voluntary martyrdom, but he showed little regret about the destruction of the images.⁶ Several decades later (ca. 417), in a letter addressed to the military tribune of Africa, Boniface, Augustine again referred to members of the dissident Donatist sect attacking statues of gods as a means of achieving recognition as martyrs and noted the change in context from when idolatry was still widely practiced to his current time, when it had been banned:

Especially when the worship of idols still existed, long columns of their [Donatists'] crowds came to the well-attended feasts of the pagans not to

smash their idols but to be killed by the worshipers of idols. For, if they chose to smash their idols when they had lawful authority, they could have some vague claim to the title of martyrs if something happened to them. But they came only for the purpose of being killed, while the idols remained intact, for each of those very powerful young idolaters had the custom of offering to the idols as many Donatists as he killed.⁷

Although this assertion may be colored by Augustine's dislike of Donatists, it seems possible that gangs of trouble-seeking individuals did attack images with the intention of being attacked in return and thereby earning the status of martyrs.

Targeting pagan idols for destruction seems to have begun during the reign of Constantine I. In his *Life of Constantine*, Eusebius claims that the emperor banned pagan sacrifices shortly after his victory over Licinius in 324 and demolished several temples, including one at Mamre in Palestine and one of Asclepius in Asia Minor.⁸ Constantine also apparently transferred countless art objects, including statues of Greek and Roman deities, from cities around the empire to Constantinople, his new capital. Although this was likely an urban beautification project, Eusebius defensively insists that the emperor's motives were otherwise: to expose the pagan gods to public mockery.⁹ Whatever Constantine intended or accomplished, the earliest indisputable legislation aimed at the destruction of temples and gods' images dates to circa 341-42, during the reign of his sons Constans and Constantius II.¹⁰ In his treatise *The Error of the Pagan*

Religions, the Christian advocate Firmicus Maternus entreats those two rulers to exterminate temples and idols, insisting that they have been divinely appointed to the task and will be especially favored by God for carrying it out.^{[11](#)}

As Christianity grew in political power, official attacks on the Greco-Roman cult became more frequent. From the 340s onward, emperors not only prohibited performances of the traditional sacrifices but at various points ordered the eradication of gods' images and transferred temples to secular use. Two such laws were enacted during the joint reign of Theodosius I and his sons Arcadius and Honorius. One from 392, which was reaffirmed in 395, decrees making offerings to vain images fabricated by human artisans to be a complete outrage against true religion.^{[12](#)}

Much of the official legislation concerning faith, however, was aimed at inhibiting mob action in order to maintain civic peace, and sometimes it evinces respect for prized cultural treasures that depicted pagan gods. For example, when, in 382, the emperors Gratian, Theodosius I, and Valentinian I issued a decree to make an Edessan temple open to the common use of the people, they also ordered the preservation of any of its images deemed to have artistic merit.^{[13](#)} Laws promulgated by Honorius and Arcadius in 399 were evidently meant to convert certain temples into public monuments and specify that any removal of idols from public spaces be officially supervised and carried out only after proper investigations.^{[14](#)} The temples themselves, once empty of offending idols, were to

be left undamaged. The moderating provisions appear to have been nullified when a law from 407 once more authorized the forcible removal of cult images and altars from temples and shrines.^{[15](#)}

A few surviving works document polytheists' objections to these attacks. Around 386, the rhetorician Libanius crafted a defense of pagan monuments that not only petitioned for toleration and the preservation of order but argued that destruction was futile as a means of terminating polytheist practices: demolishing magnificent buildings and dispossessing their patrons of the superb sculptures they contained only made adherents more committed to them.^{[16](#)} He also contended that the empire's well-being depended on the temples' maintenance, if only because they were the pride of their cities and a source of revenue for the imperial treasury.^{[17](#)}

Polytheists had more to worry about than anti-pagan imperial legislation, much of which, as we have seen, prescribed orderly and authorized removal of cult images. According to the early fifth-century church historians Socrates, Sozomen, and Theodoret, when the emperor Julian (r. 361-63) attempted to restore pagan temples and sacrifices, angry crowds of Christians took the initiative and mutilated and destroyed the temples' statues, even suffering torture and execution for doing so.^{[18](#)}

While it is difficult to know how much to rely on these Christian historians' accounts, they include multiple instances of retaliatory brutality by pagans against

Christians for damaging their gods' effigies. Sozomen reported that Christians in Alexandria attempted to take over a Mithraeum, removed its images, and paraded them through the city to hold them up to ridicule. In response, furious pagans turned on the instigators with swords and stones, killing many of them, some by crucifixion, in a retaliatory form of derision of the Christian religion.^{[19](#)} However violent and bloody the reprisals, Christian zealots clearly persisted.

Theodoret's chronicle recounts Christian witnesses describing heavenly signs of approval for the destruction they wrought. In a story that echoes the contest between Elijah and the priests of Baal (1 Kgs 18), he relates the case of Bishop Marcellus of Apamea (d. 389), who, following the edicts of Theodosius, attempted to destroy his city's magnificent Temple of Jupiter. Failing because of the building's strength, the bishop prayed for a miracle. A stranger appeared and offered to burn down the temple but was thwarted by a demon, who kept the fire from taking hold. The bishop brought a pail of water to the temple's altar, made the sign of the cross over it, and had a deacon sprinkle the water around the site. The demon was unable to withstand the power of the holy water and fled. When a fire was lit this time, the water acted as an incendiary element and the temple instantly burned to the ground. Unfortunately, the bishop was murdered by assassins hired by infuriated local pagans.^{[20](#)}

One of the most famous and violent incidents of temple destruction was the razing of the Serapeum in Alexandria in 391.^{[21](#)} Although it had precedents in local anti-pagan actions elsewhere in Egypt, this episode was explicitly ordered by Emperor Theodosius, according to Socrates, in response to a petition from the city's bishop, Theophilus, whom Theodosius put in charge of the demolition.^{[22](#)} Theodoret added that the Christian assailants were initially reluctant to attack the statue of Serapis, for fear that the furious god might cause the earth to split open and the sky to fall. After a moment's pause, however, a soldier took up an ax and began to bash the image's face. Once it was evident that it was safe to carry on, he pulled the head off the torso, chopped up other parts of the body, and dragged all the pieces off, including the torso, to be torched in the amphitheater in the sight of all the city's residents. One of the shrine's defenders, a certain Olympus, encouraged his fellow pagans' almost hopeless resistance by insisting that death was preferable to neglecting their ancestral gods and that the loss of their divine images did not warrant renouncing their traditional religion.^{[23](#)}

Sozomen's version of the events states that many Christians were killed or wounded in the incident but that once calm was restored, Theodosius dispatched a letter to Theophilus both granting official pardon to any of the pagan offenders who would convert to Christianity and permitting the bishop to destroy the city's remaining temples and cult images. Also according to Sozomen, the

emperor further proclaimed those who had been killed for acts of image or temple destruction could be officially counted as martyrs.^{[24](#)} In Socrates's account, however, after all the temples were razed, the emperor preserved one of their statues—the rest were melted down into useful utensils—setting it up in a public space, lest the pagans ever deny that they had worshiped such things.^{[25](#)}

From the other end of the empire comes an account of Martin of Tours's attacks on idols in Gaul. His biographer Sulpicius Severus (c. 363–425) wrote that when Martin attempted to overthrow a temple and destroy its images, a local pagan tried to assassinate him. Martin offered his neck to the man, but instead of landing its blow, the knife was miraculously struck out of his hands and disappeared.^{[26](#)} In another place, Sulpicus recounts that as Martin prayed in preparation for destroying an immense column on top of which was a statue of some idol, a column of similar size fell from the sky and crushed the monument.^{[27](#)}

In Roman Africa, a statue of Herakles long set up in Carthage drew the ire of Christian citizens around the beginning of the fifth century when local residents sought to have it regilded, an expensive process that probably would have been paid for by a tax assessment. A group of Christians vehemently objected on the grounds that the statue was an idol proscribed by both sacred and secular law. Augustine, who happened to be in town when the controversy was brewing, tried to appease the

demonstrators and suggested that they accept a peaceful compromise. Perhaps realizing that he would face a backlash from these residents, the newly installed proconsul, who authorized such expenditures, surreptitiously allowed that Herakles's beard could be shaved (presumably by chiseling).[28](#)

Unfortunately, his stratagem did not mollify the protesters, who began to agitate for a full-scale demolition of all existing temples and cult images. Augustine, acknowledging their anger while attempting to defuse it, offered a placating sermon that included this rationalization:

What can an inanimate lump of stone want? No, he didn't want anything and couldn't do anything. But those who wanted him gilded blushed at finding him shaved. So a sudden idea, heaven knows how, suddenly occurred to the newly appointed magistrate. What did he do? He didn't do anything that would mean a Christian honoring a stone, but something that meant a Christian being so angry with that superstitious object that he had it shaved. He did not bow down to worship it, he took action to punish it. Brothers, I think it was a much greater humiliation for Hercules to have his beard shaved off than to have his head cut off.[29](#)

Augustine's strategy of appeasement apparently paid off here. A slightly earlier disturbance, in the colony of Sufes in western Byzacena, did not end so well, however. In an overzealous attempt to implement one of the laws passed by Honorius and Arcadius in 399 mandating an orderly removal of idols, a group of Christians overstepped their authority and toppled a statue of Herakles in the town's forum. In retaliation, inflamed defenders of their patron

god massacred sixty of the attackers. Augustine dispatched a letter to the colony's leaders, condemning the murders and sarcastically offering to restore their statue if they would restore the lost lives. The dead were subsequently included in the Roman martyrology and celebrated on August 30 (which may have been the day of the riot). In this instance, Augustine seemingly approved of granting these Christians the title of martyr.^{[30](#)}

Christians did not destroy all the pagan gods' images, of course. Their preservation in museums around the world is evidence that many survived. Historians have argued that the sources exaggerate the extent of the destruction.^{[31](#)} Some archaeologists note that numerous statues were removed to private homes or even simply left where they were.^{[32](#)} As traditional polytheism diminished, they became merely artifacts of Roman heritage. Their aesthetic and cultural value may have contributed to their survival, even in Christian homes or institutions. They testified to their owners' cultivated taste, wealth, and social status.^{[33](#)} For example, Palladas of Alexandria conceded that many wealthy fourth-century Egyptian Christians refused to give up their statues, because they viewed them as precious works of art.^{[34](#)} In his refutation of the pagan senator Symmachus's defense of the Altar of Victory, Prudentius, while warning against turning monuments into idols, specifically acknowledges that some statues of gods, the works of great artists, are the nation's ornaments and should be allowed to remain.^{[35](#)} In some cases, such statues

appear to have been exorcised, purified, or even “baptized” by the addition of a Christian cross on the forehead or torso (see fig. E.1). This may have been meant to save works deemed especially valuable, by making them acceptably Christian.^{[36](#)} It may also have been a way of expelling resident demons and preventing new ones from taking up residence, as the sign of the cross was believed to have an exorcistic function.^{[37](#)} For example, Anthony of Egypt (251–336) urged his disciples to make this sign on their bodies to repel demons, who, he explained, would disappear as soon as they caught sight of it.^{[38](#)} Similarly, Lactantius maintained that the cross sign, if traced on the forehead, would ward off evil spirits.^{[39](#)} Cyril of Jerusalem, while preparing catechumens for baptism, advised his flock to wear the sign openly on their brows, to drive demons away.^{[40](#)}



FIGURE E.1 Marble statue of Herakles holding apples, now in the Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology, University of California, Berkeley. (Catalog number 8-3429; photo use courtesy of the Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology and the Regents of the University of California.)

Centuries later, Christians, still worried about idolatry, destroyed sacred statues and other images of Christ and their own saints rather than those of other people's gods. The attacks on Christian icons in the Byzantine Empire in the eighth and ninth centuries were reprised in the West during the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century. The motives, theological arguments, and sociopolitical circumstances of each of these anti-image movements are exceedingly complex and not the subject of this study. Nevertheless, many of the same concerns were raised by those who had earlier condemned icons and other sacred art: fears about mistaken veneration of human-made objects, the belief that the material and sensible realm is greatly inferior to the spiritual one and that the two should not be confused, and finally, the assertion that the true God is invisible and essentially unimageable. In response, those who defended these images upheld the positive capacity of the senses, particularly sight, for encountering and comprehending the divine, whether in epiphanic and visionary experiences, the sacraments, or even more powerfully, the incarnation of Christ.

ABBREVIATIONS

Titles of ancient works are abbreviated as in *The SBL Handbook of Style* or the *Encyclopedia of Ancient Christianity*, edited by Angelo Di Berardino.

ACO	Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum
ACW	Ancient Christian Writers
AGLB	Aus der Geschichte der lateinischen Bibel
BSGRT	Bibliotheca Scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum Series Latina
CEAug	Collection des études augustinienes
CGLC	Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics
CSEL	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum
GCS	Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
OECT	Oxford Early Christian Texts
PG	Patrologiae Cursus Completus: Series Graeca
PL	Patrologiae Cursus Completus: Series Latina
PPS	Popular Patristics Series

PTS	Patristische Texte und Studien
SC	Sources chrétiennes
VCS	Vigiliae Christianae Supplements
WGRW	Writings from the Greco-Roman World

OceanofPDF.com

NOTES

All Bible quotes are from the New Revised Standard Version.

PREFACE

- [1.](#) Flannery O'Connor, "Parker's Back," in O'Connor, *The Complete Stories* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1972), 522, 529.
- [2.](#) John Calvin, *Inst.* 1.11.4.

CHAPTER 1. EARLY CHRISTIAN CONDEMNATION OF IDOLS

- [1.](#) John Calvin, *Inst.* 1.10–11 generally and 1.11.1 in particular.
- [2.](#) Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (repr., London: G. Cowie, 1825), 176 (6.49).
- [3.](#) Ernst Kitzinger, “The Cult of Images in the Age before Iconoclasm,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 8 (1954): 86.
- [4.](#) Ernst Kitzinger, *Byzantine Art in the Making* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), 3.
- [5.](#) Theodor Klauser, “Die Äusserungen der Alten Kirche zur Kunst: Revision der Zeugnisse, Folgerungen für die archäologische Forschung,” in *Atti del VI Congresso internazionale di archeologia cristiana* (Vatican City: Pontificio istituto di archeologia cristiana, 1965), 223–42, esp. 232–35. See also the earlier work of Hugo Koch, *Die altchristliche Bilderfrage nach den literarischen Quellen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1917). Others who similarly describe early Christianity as aniconic and obedient to Mosaic commandments include Edwyn Bevan, *Holy Images: An Inquiry into Idolatry and Image-Worship in Ancient Paganism and in Christianity* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1940), 84–85; Robert Grigg, “Aniconic Worship and the Apologetic Tradition: A Note on Canon 36 of the Council of Elvira,” *Church History* 45 (1976): 428–33; James Breckenridge, “The Reception of Art into the Early Church,” *Atti del IX Congresso internazionale di archeologia cristiana*, vol. 1 (Vatican City: Pontificio istituto di archeologia cristiana, 1978), 361–69.
- [6.](#) Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church* (London: Penguin, 1967), 277, citing Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.25.6.
- [7.](#) Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, trans. E. Jephcott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 144.
- [8.](#) Mary Charles-Murray, “Art and the Early Church,” *Journal of Theological Studies*, n.s. 28 (1977): 303.
- [9.](#) Paul Corby Finney, *The Invisible God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).
- [10.](#) For an analysis of Minucius Felix’s background and dates and the historical setting of the dialogue and its literary parallels in both classical and Christian texts, etc., see Graeme W. Clarke, *The “Octavius” of Marcus Minucius Felix* (New York: Newman, 1974), 1–50.

- [11.](#) Minucius Felix, *Oct.* 10.5.
- [12.](#) Minucius Felix, *Oct.* 18.8.
- [13.](#) Minucius Felix, *Oct.* 19. The Latin here is *mens et ratio et spiritus*. The citation alludes to Plato, *Tim.* 28C-29B; see Clarke, "*Octavius*," 272n260.
- [14.](#) Minucius Felix, *Oct.* 32.4-6.
- [15.](#) Minucius Felix, *Oct.* 24.5. See the parallel attack in Justin Martyr, *1 Apol.* 9, where he asserts that such artisans practice various vices, including corrupting the girls who work with them. This same characterization of artists appears in Tertullian, *Apol.* 12.2, *Idol.* 7.2.
- [16.](#) Minucius Felix, *Oct.* 24.1-3, 24.7-9. On the assertion that the pagan gods were merely long-dead human beings, an argument associated with Euhemerus of Messene, see also *Oct.* 21.1-3, 24.1-5. This claim is reiterated throughout Christian writings: see, e.g., Tertullian, *Idol.* 15.2, *Apol.* 12.2; Clement of Alexandria, *Protr.* 2.24.2, 29.1; Athenagoras, *Leg.* 18; Theophilus, *Atol.* 1.9, 2.2; Arnobius, *Nat.* 1.37; Firmicus Maternus, *Err. prof. rel.* 2-3; Augustine, *Civ.* 7.18, 8.26. On this subject see also Jean Pepin, "The Euhemerism of the Christian Authors," in *Roman and European Mythologies*, ed. Y. Bonnefoy, trans. W. Doniger (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 176-81.
- [17.](#) Minucius Felix, *Oct.* 26-27.
- [18.](#) Minucius Felix, *Oct.* 11, 33.
- [19.](#) Minucius Felix, *Oct.* 32.2; cf. Cicero, *Nat. deo.* 2.7, and others, noted by Clarke, "*Octavius*," 344n537.
- [20.](#) For citations of the Decalogue, see Clement, *Strom.* 5.5; Tertullian, *Idol.* 3.3-4; Origen, *Cels.* 4.31; also Firmicus Maternus, *Err. prof. rel.* 28 (where he also cites Wis 15:15-17; Ps 134:15-18; Ep Jer 6; Isa 42:17).
- [21.](#) Justin Martyr, *1 Apol.* 9.
- [22.](#) Athenagoras, *Leg.* 15, trans. Joseph Hugh Crehan, *Athenagoras: "Embassy for the Christians," "The Resurrection of the Dead,"* ACW 23 (New York: Paulist Press, 1956), 45-46. Critical edition: *Athenagoras: Legatio pro Christianis*, PTS 31, ed. Miroslav Marcovich (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1994).
- [23.](#) Athenagoras, *Leg.* 23. See parallels in the works of later writers such as Firmicus Maternus, *Err. prof. rel.* 13.4; Augustine, *Ep.* 102.20, *Enarrat. ps.* 96.11, 113.
- [24.](#) Athenagoras, *Leg.* 26-27. This idea—that the demons eat the sacrificial food—also appears in Tertullian, *Apol.* 22.15, *Scap.* 2. By contrast, Clement of Alexandria, *Prot.* 4, argues that the idols themselves were not fed, as being senseless things of wood or stone. Similar assertions are made by

the second-century writers Theophilus of Antioch, *Autol.* 1.10, and the anonymous author of the *Epistle to Diognetus*, who distinguishes between the gods and their images (2).

- [25.](#) Clement of Alexandria, *Protrep.* 4.
- [26.](#) Clement of Alexandria, *Protrep.* 4; cf. Plato, *Rep.* 10.
- [27.](#) Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 5.5.
- [28.](#) Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 6.16.
- [29.](#) Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 5.6.
- [30.](#) Origen, *Cels.* 8.24.
- [31.](#) Origen, *Cels.* 3.34, 7.64, 7.69. On the role of consecration or dedication rituals, see “Rituals of Consecration and Material Transformation” later in this chapter.
- [32.](#) See Stéphanie Binder, *Tertullian, “On Idolatry” and Mishnah “Avodah Zarah”: Questioning the Parting of the Ways between Christians and Jews* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 64–75, esp. 74.
- [33.](#) Tertullian, *Idol.* 1.1–3 (CCSL 2: 1101). On spitting or blowing on idols, see Tertullian, *Idol.* 11.7, also *Apol.* 23.16. Similar mentions appear in Minucius Felix, *Oct.* 8.4; Eusebius, *Hist.* 10.4.15; Augustine, *Cont. Jul.* 6.23(7).
- [34.](#) Tertullian, *Idol.* 1.4 (CCSL 2: 1101).
- [35.](#) Tertullian, *Idol.* 14.4–15.7 (CCSL 2: 1115–17); see also *Spec.* 8.10.
- [36.](#) Tertullian, *Idol.* 17–18.
- [37.](#) Tertullian, *Idol.* 3.3–4 (CCSL 2: 1103), trans. J. H. Waszink and J. G. M. Winden, *Tertullianus: De idololatria* (Leiden: Brill, 1987), 27. See the parallel passage in *Idol.* 7.2, where Tertullian condemns idol makers for trying to enter churches, comparing them to those who crucified Christ and saying that their hands are contaminated.
- [38.](#) Tertullian, *Idol.* 1.4 (CCSL 2: 1101).
- [39.](#) Tertullian, *Scorp.* 2.2.
- [40.](#) Tertullian, *Idol.* 5.2–4.
- [41.](#) Tertullian, *Marc.* 2.22; see also *Idol.* 5.3. For other defenses of graven images in the Hebrew scriptures, see Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 2.2; Origen, *Hom. Exod.* 9.3.
- [42.](#) Tertullian, *Idol.* 15.5–6. On rites of consecration, see “Rituals of Consecration and Material Transformation” later in this chapter. For a broader study of the Christian perceptions of the links between demons and temples, see Robert Wiśniewski, “Pagan Temples, Christians, and

- Demons in the Late Antique East and West," *Sacris erudi* 54 (2016): 111-28.
- [43.](#) Tertullian, *Spec.* 8, 10, *Apol.* 22.
- [44.](#) See Emma Wasserman, "'An Idol Is Nothing in the World' (1 Cor 8:4): The Metaphysical Contradictions of 1 Corinthians 8:1-11:1 in the Context of Jewish Idolatry Polemics," in *Portraits of Jesus: Studies in Christology*, ed. S. Myers (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 201-27.
- [45.](#) See n. 16 above for a discussion of euhemerism.
- [46.](#) Wisdom of Solomon 14:12-13, 14:18-21.
- [47.](#) Epistle of Jeremiah 6:4-6. The entire text deals with the idolatry of foreign religions.
- [48.](#) Wasserman, "'An Idol Is Nothing,'" 204-6, 215-20.
- [49.](#) Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *Quaest. Ex.* 38.
- [50.](#) On the ubiquity of the gods and the variety of their physical settings, see Kristine Iara, "Seeing the Gods in Late Antique Rome," in *Seeing the God: Image, Space, Performance, and Vision in the Religion of the Roman Empire*, ed. Marlis Arnhold, Harry O. Maier, and Jörg Rüpke (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 60-84.
- [51.](#) Argued by Coenraad A.J. van Ouwerkerk, "'Effigies Dei' and the Religious Imagination: A Psychological Perspective," in *Effigies Dei: Essays on the History of Religions*, ed. Dirk van der Plas (Leiden: Brill, 1987), 156-70.
- [52.](#) See Sylvia Estienne, "*Simulacrum Deorum* versus *Ornamenta Aedium*: The Status of Divine Images in the Temples of Rome," in *Divine Images and Human Imaginations in Ancient Greece and Rome*, ed. Joannis Mylonopoulos (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 257-71.
- [53.](#) Apuleius, *Apol.* 63.
- [54.](#) For more on this relief, see Katja Lembke, "Ein Relief aus Ariccia und seine Geschichte," *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts (Rome)* 101 (1994): 97-102.
- [55.](#) Peter Stewart, *Statues in Roman Society: Representation and Response* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 40. See also Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, *Houses and Society in Pompeii and Herculaneum* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 25-26.
- [56.](#) See Philip Kiernan, *Roman Cult Images: The Lives and Worship of Idols from the Iron Age to Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 1-14, 182-95. See also Jörg Rüpke, "Representation or Presence? Picturing the Divine in Ancient Rome," *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* 12 (2010): 181-96, esp. 181-82. Here Rüpke discusses

the case of Cicero, whose house Clodius seized and turned into a sanctuary without Cicero's permission.

- [57.](#) Peter Stewart, *Statues in Roman Society*, 191–93, citing Hanz G. Martin, *Römische Tempelkultbilder: Ein archäologische Untersuchung zur späten Republik* (Rome: “L’Erma” di Bretschneider, 1992), who emphasizes the significance of consecration. Stewart goes on to consider gods’ images on small objects such as lamps and coins, as well as wall paintings of statues, which could also have cultic functions. See also Kristine Iara, “Seeing the Gods.”
- [58.](#) On these various kinds of ritual actions see Burkhard Gladigow, “Präsenz der Bilder—Präsenz der Götter: Kultbilder und Bilder der Götter in der griechischen Religion,” *Visible Religion* 4–5 (1985–86): 114–33; Pascale Linant de Bellefonds, “Rites and Activities Related to Cult Images,” *Thesaurus cultus et rituum antiquorum* 2, no. 5 (2004): 418–62.
- [59.](#) Tertullian, *Ad nat.* 1.10. On the gods at the *pompa*, see Jacob Latham, *Performance, Memory, and Processions in Ancient Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), esp. chap. 4.
- [60.](#) Augustine, *Civ.* 6.10 (CCSL 47: 180–83), quoting a fragment from Seneca in a lost book on superstition; trans. William Babcock, *The City of God, The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, pt. 1, vol. 6 (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2012), 203. See also the mention by Tertullian, *Apol.* 12.
- [61.](#) Plutarch, *Cor.* 37–38. Critical edition: K. Ziegler, “Γάιος Μάρκιος καὶ Ἀλκιβιάδης,” in *Plutarchi: Vitae parallelae*, vol. 1, fasc. 2, BSGRT (Leipzig: Teubner, 1957), 183–225. Dionysius of Halicarnassus also tells the story of the speaking statue (8.56).
- [62.](#) See Clifford Ando, *The Matter of the Gods: Religion and the Roman Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), esp. chap. 2; Ando, “Praesentia Numinis, Part 1: The Visibility of Roman Gods,” *Asdiwal* 5 (2010): 45–73; Rüpke, “Representation or Presence?,” 191–92.
- [63.](#) A helpful treatment of this phenomenon is in Verity Platt, *Facing the Gods: Epiphany and Representation in Graeco-Roman Art, Literature, and Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 122–23.
- [64.](#) Peter Stewart, *Statues in Roman Society*, 20–23. See also Estienne, “*Simulacrum Deorum*,” 258–61.
- [65.](#) Peter Stewart, *Statues in Roman Society*, 23.
- [66.](#) Peter Stewart, *Statues in Roman Society*, 25, 67–68; see also Margalit Finkelberg, “Two Kinds of Representations in Greek Religious Art,” in

- Representations in Religion: Studies in Honor of Moshe Barash*, ed. J. Assmann and A. Baumgarten (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 27–41; Milette Gaifman, *Aniconism in Greek Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 11.
- [67.](#) See Gaifman, *Aniconism in Greek Antiquity*, 10, 87, where she cites A. A. Donohue, *Xoana and the Origins of Greek Sculpture* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1988) and Tanja S. Scheer, *Die Gottheit und ihr Bild: Untersuchungen zur Funktion griechischer Kultbilder in Religion und Politik* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2000), 19–21. See also Deborah Tarn Steiner, *Images in Mind: Statues in Archaic and Classical Greek Literature and Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 80–89.
- [68.](#) See Ando, *Matter of the Gods*, 21–42, citing Livy 29.10.8. Also much discussed by Richard Gordon, “The Real and Imaginary: Production and Religion in the Graeco-Roman World,” *Art History* 2, no. 1 (1979): 7. An older study of this question comes from H. S. Versnel, “What Did Ancient Man See When He Saw a God? Some Reflections on Greco-Roman Epiphany,” in *Effigies Dei: Essays on the History of Religions*, ed. Dirk van der Plas (Leiden: Brill, 1987), 42–55.
- [69.](#) Plutarch, *Is. Os.* 379C–D, trans. Frank Cole Babbitt, *Plutarch’s “Moralia,”* LCL (London: Heinemann, 1936), 165. Critical edition: *Plutarch’s “De Iside et Osiride,”* ed. John Gwyn Griffiths (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1970).
- [70.](#) See, e.g., Homer, *Il.* 5.451, 23.103–4, *Od.* 4.796.
- [71.](#) Minucius Felix, *Oct.* 24.8, trans. Clarke, “*Octavius*,” 94. Critical edition: *M. Minuci Felicis: Octavius*, BSGRT, ed. Bernhard Kytzler (Leipzig: Teubner, 1982).
- [72.](#) Tertullian, *Idol.* 3, 4.2, 15.5–6. See also Tertullian, *Spec.* 13.
- [73.](#) Tertullian, *Apol.* 12.2.
- [74.](#) Linant de Bellefonds, “Rites and Activities.”
- [75.](#) See, e.g., Tertullian, *Spec.* 10.
- [76.](#) Tertullian, *Idol.* 1.
- [77.](#) Justin Martyr, *1 Apol.* 9, 20. Compare Athenagoras, *Leg.* 6.
- [78.](#) Tertullian, *Apol.* 46.4.
- [79.](#) Minucius Felix, *Oct.* 19.
- [80.](#) Clement of Alexandria, *Protrep.* 4–7.
- [81.](#) Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 5.11–14.
- [82.](#) Origen *Cels.* 1.5; see also Athenagoras, *Leg.* 6.
- [83.](#) Origen, *Cels.* 7.62, 7.65–66, 8.17–18.

- [84.](#) Plato, *Leg.* 11.931a1-4, trans. Robert Gregg Bury, *Plato: Laws*, LCL (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 447, 449. Critical edition: *Les lois, livres XI-XII*, ed. A. Diès and E. des Places, vol. 12 of *Platon: Oeuvres complètes*, 2nd rev. ed. (Paris: “Les Belles Lettres,” 1976).
- [85.](#) Maximus of Tyre, *Diss.* 2.2, 2.10.
- [86.](#) For a summary see Alain Besançon, *The Forbidden Image: An Intellectual History of Iconoclasm*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 18-52; Moshe Barasch, *Icon: Studies in the History of an Idea* (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 49-62.
- [87.](#) Eusebius, *Praep. ev.* 3.7.1, with preserved fragments of Porphyry’s lost treatise *Peri agalmaton*.
- [88.](#) Eusebius *Praep. ev.* 3.7-8, again citing Porphyry’s *Peri agalmaton* and his *Orph. frag.* 6.1; Plutarch, *De daedalis Plataeensibus* (preserved only in Eusebius).
- [89.](#) Arnobius, *Nat.* 6.9, 6.17. Compare Augustine on why not directly address the sun or the sea, *Serm.* 198.17 (Dolbeau 26).
- [90.](#) Arnobius, *Nat.* 6.17.
- [91.](#) Arnobius, *Nat.* 6.24.
- [92.](#) Julian, *Frag. ep.* (*Fragment of a Letter to a Priest*) 294C-D. Trans., Wilmer Cave Wright, *The Works of the Emperor Julian*, vol. 2, LCL (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1913), 311. Critical edition: *Iuliani Augusti opera*, BSGRT, ed. Heinz-Günther Nesselrath (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015).
- [93.](#) Augustine, *Serm.* 23B, trans. Edmund Hill, *Newly Discovered Sermons*, The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, pt. 3, vol. 11 (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1991), 41. Critical edition: *Vingt-six sermons au peuple d’Afrique*, CEAug, Série antiquité 147, ed. François Dolbeau (Paris: Institut d’études augustiniennes, 1996), sermon 6.8.
- [94.](#) Augustine, *Enarrat. Ps.* 113(2), 4-7.

CHAPTER 2. ANICONISM

- [1.](#) Minucius Felix, *Oct.* 18.8.
- [2.](#) Athenagoras, *Leg.* 6-7, 17-18.
- [3.](#) Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 1.15.
- [4.](#) Plutarch, *Num.* 8.8.
- [5.](#) Clement of Alexandria, *Prot.* 6, quoting Euripides, frag. 1129. See also Clement, *Strom.* 5.12-14.
- [6.](#) Clement of Alexandria, *Prot.* 6, quoting Antisthenes, frag. 40B. See also Origen, *Cels.* 1.5; Paul Corby Finney, *The Invisible God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 44.
- [7.](#) Tertullian, *Apol.* 25.
- [8.](#) Tertullian, *Nat.* 1.10.41.
- [9.](#) Tertullian, *Idol.* 3.
- [10.](#) Arnobius, *Nat.* 7.1. At 7.26 he also mentions Numa but does not describe him as being aniconic.
- [11.](#) On Varro's works see Hubert Cancik and Hildegard Cancik-Lindemaier, "The Truth of Images: Cicero and Varro on Image Worship," in *Representation in Religion: Studies in Honor of Moshe Barasch*, ed. J. Assmann and A. Baumgarten (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 43-61. See also Lily Ross Taylor, "Aniconic Worship among the Early Romans," in *Classical Studies in Honor of John C. Rolfe*, ed. G.D. Hadzsits (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1931), 305-19; a brief section on aniconism in ancient societies in Finney, *Invisible God*, 45-47.
- [12.](#) Augustine, *Civ.* 7.5. See also 8.5, where Augustine discusses King Numa. For fragments of Varro's text reconstructed from the works of Augustine, see Varro, *M. Terentius Varro, Antiquitates rerum divinarum*, 2 vols., ed. Burkhardt Cardauns (Mainz: Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur, 1976).
- [13.](#) Augustine, *Civ.* 4.31. On Varro's comparison of Jewish aniconism with ancient Roman aniconism and his identification of the Jewish God with Jupiter, see Peter Schäfer, *Judeophobia: Attitudes toward the Jews in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 36-38.
- [14.](#) Origen, *Cels.* 4.31. Another example of Origen's citation of the biblical prohibition is found in his *Homilies on Exodus* (8.3-4). On the biblical texts themselves, see "Scripture as a Resource for Anti-idolatry Polemics" in chap. 1.

- [15.](#) For detailed discussion of this subject, see Michael B. Dick, "Prophetic Parodies of Making the Cult Image," in *Born in Heaven, Made on Earth: The Making of the Cult Image in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Dick (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 1-53; Tryggve N.D. Mettinger, "Israelite Aniconism: Developments and Origins," in *The Image and the Book: Iconic Cults, Aniconism, and the Rise of Book Religion in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, ed. K. van der Toorn (Leuven: Peeters, 1997), 173-204.
- [16.](#) Hans J.L. Jensen, "Aniconic Propaganda in the Hebrew Bible, or: The Possible Birth of Religious Seriousness," *Religion* 47 (2018): 399-407.
- [17.](#) On this question, with summary discussion of various scholarly analyses, see Tallay Ornan, *The Triumph of the Symbol: Pictorial Representation of Deities in Mesopotamia and the Biblical Image Ban* (Fribourg: Academic Press Fribourg; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 2005); Ornan, "The Throne and the Enthroned: On the Conceived Image of Yahweh in Iron II Jerusalem," *Tel Aviv* 46, no. 2 (2019): 198-210. See also H.G.M. Williamson, "Was There an Image of the Deity in the First Temple?," in *The Image and Its Prohibition in Jewish Antiquity*, ed. Sarah Pearce (Oxford: Journal of Jewish Studies, 2013), 28-48; Brian Schmidt, "The Aniconic Tradition: On Reading Images and Viewing Texts," in *The Triumph of Elohim: From Yahwisms to Judaisms*, ed. D. Edelman (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 75-105; Herbert Niehr, "In Search of YHWH's Cult Statue in the First Temple," in *Image and the Book*, ed. K. van der Toorn, 73-95, esp. 81-90. Niehr draws partly upon the work of Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger, *Göttinnen, Götter und Gottessymbole: Neue Erkenntnisse zur Religionsgeschichte Kanaans und Israels aufgrund bislang unerschlossener ikonographischer Quellen* (Fribourg: Academic Press Fribourg, 1992), but see, more recently, Uehlinger, "Anthropomorphic Cult Statuary in Iron Age Palestine and the Search for Yahweh's Cult Images," in *Image and the Book*, ed. van der Toorn, 97-155.
- [18.](#) This is Williamson's general conclusion in "Was There an Image?"
- [19.](#) See Tryggve N.D. Mettinger, *No Graven Images? Israelite Aniconism in Its Ancient Near Eastern Context* (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1995), 18-27.
- [20.](#) Philo, *Decal.* 14.65-66. On Philo's reading of the Decalogue, see the excellent summary article by Sarah Pearce, "Philo of Alexandria on the Second Commandment," in Pearce, *Image and Its Prohibition*, 49-76.
- [21.](#) Philo, *Contempl.* 1.7, *Decal.* 14.69-70. See also *Giants* 13.58-59.
- [22.](#) Josephus, *Ant.* 8.194-95.

- [23.](#) Josephus, *Ant.* 17.148-64, *B.J.* 1.648-55.
- [24.](#) Josephus, *Ant.* 17.3-4, 18.55-59, 17.150-64, *B.J.* 1.649-55, 2.169-71.
- [25.](#) Philo, *Legat.* 278-79, 290; Josephus, *Ant.* 18.257-309, *B.J.* 2.184-203. See also the incident of Pilate's introducing Roman standards with busts of the emperor into Jerusalem: Josephus, *B.J.* 2.269-74, *Ant.* 18.55-59. For an excellent summary of these texts, see Jason von Ehrenkrook, *Sculpting Idolatry in Flavian Rome: (An)Iconic Rhetoric in the Writings of Flavius Josephus* (Atlanta: SBL, 2011). See also John M. Barclay, "Snarling Sweetly: Josephus on Images and Idolatry," in *Idolatry: False Worship in the Bible, Early Judaism, and Christianity*, ed. Stephen C. Barton (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 73-87; Helen Bond, "Standards, Shields, and Coins: Jewish Reactions to Aspects of the Roman Cult in the Time of Pilate," in *ibid.*, 88-106.
- [26.](#) Philo, *Legat.* 278-79, 290. This story is also recounted by Josephus, who says that Caligula honored a promise to Agrippa to grant a wish (*Ant.* 18.289-97).
- [27.](#) Josephus, *Ad Apion*, 2.77.
- [28.](#) See Kalman Bland, *The Artless Jew: Medieval and Modern Affirmations and Denials of the Visual* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Margaret Olin, *The Nation without Art* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001). Some historians qualify the supposed Jewish aniconism of the Hellenistic and Second Temple period as limited to idolatrous images but not a rejection of all forms of pictorial art. See Rachel Hachlili, *Ancient Jewish Art and Archeology in the Land of Israel* (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 1; Steven Fine, *Art and Judaism in the Greco-Roman World: Toward a New Jewish Archaeology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 69-72.
- [29.](#) See, e.g., Edwyn Bevan, *Holy Images: An Inquiry into Idolatry and Image-Worship in Ancient Paganism and Early Christianity* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1940); more recently, Fine, *Art and Judaism*, 73-81.
- [30.](#) Von Ehrenkrook, *Sculpting Idolatry*, 3-4, 24-25, citing Joseph Gutmann, "The Second Commandment and the Image in Judaism," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 32 (1961): 161-74. See also Barclay, "Snarling Sweetly."
- [31.](#) Strabo, *Geogr.* 16.2.35.
- [32.](#) Cassius Dio, *Hist.* 37.17.2-3.
- [33.](#) According to Menahem Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, vol. 1 (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1974), 330, this is from Livy, *Hist.* 102. Stern got this from Hermann

Usener, ed., *M. Annaei Lucani: Commenta Bernensia*, Scholia in Lucani Bellum Civile 1 (Leipzig: Teubner, 1869), 2.593: “incerti iudea dei. Livius de Judaeis: ‘Hierosolimis fanum cuius deorum sit no nominant, neque ullum ibi simulacrum est, neque enim esse dei figuram putant’.”

[34.](#) Tacitus *Hist.* 5.5.

[35.](#) Tacitus *Hist.* 5.9. Earlier in the work, however, Tacitus claims that Jews dedicated a statue of an ass in a shrine (*Hist.* 5.2). Tertullian refers to a similar slander, about a Jewish “donkey priest” who carried around a picture of an ass with the inscription “The God of the Christians, born of an ass” (*Nat.* 1.14, *Apol.* 16.5; see also Minucius Felix, *Oct.* 28.7-8). The famous Roman graffito of Alexamenos (*Graffito blasfemo*), now in the Palatine Museum, which depicts a man apparently worshipping a crucified donkey-man, may be associated with this rumor.

[36.](#) Tacitus, *Hist.* 5.13.

[37.](#) Fine, *Art and Judaism*, 77-78, 86-76.

[38.](#) See Lee I. Levine, *Visual Judaism in Late Antiquity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 69-178; Rina Talgam, *Mosaics of Faith: Floors of Pagans, Jews, Samaritans, Christians, and Muslims in the Holy Land* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014), 247-332. Fine presents the evidence and discusses possible reasons for the change in attitude in *Art and Judaism*, 82-123.

[39.](#) y. ‘Abod. Zar. 3.1, 42b-c. See Vivian Mann, *Jewish Texts on the Visual Arts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 20-23; Fine, *Art and Judaism*, 97-102; also Sacha Stern, “Images in Late Antique Palestine: Jewish and Graeco-Roman Views,” in Pearce, *Image and Its Prohibition*, 110-29, esp. 119-22.

[40.](#) Von Ehrenkrook, *Sculpting Idolatry*, 37-44; Michael Satlow, “Beyond Influence: Toward a New Historiographic Paradigm,” in *Jewish Literatures and Cultures: Context and Interpretation*, ed. A. Norich and Y. Z. Eliav, Brown Judaic Studies 349 (Providence, RI: Brown University Press, 2008), 37-54.

[41.](#) Fine, *Art and Judaism*, 70.

[42.](#) Pausanias 9.27.1, cited by Milette Gaifman, *Aniconism in Greek Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 11. See also Pausanias 7.22.4. For a brief discussion of Christian anti-anthropomorphism, see Finney, *Invisible God*, 44-45.

[43.](#) The literature is extensive, but see a recent summary in Gaifman, *Aniconism*, 7-10, especially referring to the revisionist arguments of

- Richard L. Gordon, "The Real and Imaginary: Production and Religion in the Graeco-Roman World," *Art History* 2, no. 1 (1979): 5-34, esp. 12-13.
- [44.](#) Augustine, *Enarrat. Ps.* 113(2).3-7.
- [45.](#) Cicero, *Nat. d.* 1.46. The dialogue is mentioned by Augustine, *Civ.* 4.30.
- [46.](#) Dio Chrysostom, *Dei cogn.* (*Or.* 12) 59-63, trans. J.W. Cohoon, *Dio Chrysostom: Discourses 12-13*, LCL 339 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1939), 63 (slightly adapted by author). Critical edition: *Dio Chrysostom: Orations VII, XII and XXXVI*, CGLC, edited by D. A. Russell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). On the claim that anthropomorphism is a necessary stage in a religion's evolution, see Stewart E. Guthrie, *Faces in the Clouds: A New Theory of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), esp. 62-90.
- [47.](#) Maximus of Tyre, *Diss.* 2.2, 3,10.
- [48.](#) Xenophanes, frag. 15 Diels-Kranz (1:132-33; in Diogenes Laertius, *Vit.*); Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 5.110, 7.22.
- [49.](#) Xenophanes, frag. 24 Diels-Kranz (1:135; in Sextus, *Adv. Math.* 9.144).
- [50.](#) Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.6; Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 7.7.
- [51.](#) Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 7.5.
- [52.](#) Minucius Felix, *Oct.* 22-23.
- [53.](#) Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 12.44-47.
- [54.](#) Minucius Felix, *Oct.* 22.6.
- [55.](#) Arnobius, *Nat.* 6.10.
- [56.](#) Minucius Felix. *Oct.* 21.1-3, 24.1; Tertullian, *Idol.* 15.2, *Apol.* 12.2.
- [57.](#) Aristides of Athens, *Apol.* 7.
- [58.](#) Euhemerus's *Hiera anagrahe* (*Sacra historia*) was translated into Latin in a lost work by the second-century BCE poet Ennius, cited in Diodorus Siculus, *Bib. hist.* 5.41-46, 6.1; Lactantius, *Div. inst.* 1.11, 1.13-15, 1.18, 1.22; Eusebius, *Praep. ev.* 59b. Other Christian references to Euhemerus or Euhemerism are found in Athenagoras, *Leg.* 17-18; Clement of Alexandria, *Protr.* 4.49; Theophilus, *Atol.* 1.9, 2.2; Arnobius, *Nat.* 1.37; Firmicus Maternus, *Err. prof. rel.* 2-3; Augustine, *Civ.* 7.18, 8.26. On euhemerism see Jean Pepin, "The Euhemerism of the Christian Authors," in *Roman and European Mythologies*, ed. Y. Bonnefoy, trans. W. Doniger (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 176-81.
- [59.](#) Cicero, *Nat. d.* 1.42. The Wisdom of Solomon text is also discussed in "Scripture as a Resource for Anti-idolatry Polemics" in chap. 1.
- [60.](#) Ps.-Cyprian, *Quod idola dii non sint* 1. Some scholars regard this work as genuinely Cyprian's; others dispute the attribution but regard it as a

fourth-century text at the latest, as it is cited by both Jerome and Augustine. See Johannes Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. 2, *The Ante-Nicene Literature after Irenaeus* (Westminster, MD: Newman, 1964), 363–64.

- [61.](#) Origen, *Cels.* 3.22–43. See Harry Y. Gamble, “Euhemerism and Christology in Origen: “Contra Celsum III 22–43,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 33 (1979): 12–29; Nikolas Roubekas, “Which Euhemerism Will You Use? Celsus on the Nature of Jesus,” *Journal of Early Christian History* 2 (2012): 80–96. Roubekas points out that Euhemerus never referred to heroes, only kings, and so contends that Celsus’s argument is not technically Euhemeristic but best described as Christian quasi-Euhemerism.
- [62.](#) Arnobius, *Nat.* 1.37–39.
- [63.](#) For an extensive study of the question of God’s corporeality and this distinction in early Christian thought, see Christopher Marksches, *God’s Body: Jewish, Christian, and Pagan Images of God* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2019). See also Brittany Wilson, *The Embodied God: Seeing the Divine in Luke-Acts and the Early Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).
- [64.](#) Tertullian, *Prax.* 7.7–8. On this subject see Carl W. Griffin and David L. Paulsen, “Augustine and the Corporeality of God,” *Harvard Theological Review* 95 (2002): 97–118; Paulsen, “Early Christian Belief in a Corporeal Deity: Origen and Augustine as Reluctant Witnesses,” *Harvard Theological Review* 83 (1990): 105–16. The latter is critiqued by Kim Paffenroth, “Paulsen on Augustine: An Incorporeal or Nonanthropomorphic God?,” *Harvard Theological Review* 86 (1993): 233–35, to which Griffin and Paulsen’s 2002 article is a response.
- [65.](#) Tertullian, *Carn. Chr.* 11.4.
- [66.](#) Justin Martyr, *Dial.* 3–5.
- [67.](#) Justin Martyr, *Dial.* 114.
- [68.](#) Origen, *Princ.* 1.1.1, *Comm. Jo.* 13.21–11. Both texts cited in Griffin and Paulsen, “Corporeality of God.” On Origen and the question of God’s incorporeality see Marksches, *God’s Body*, 63–69.
- [69.](#) Origen, *Cels.* 6.62 (SC 147: 332–335), trans. Henry Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 376–77.
- [70.](#) Origen, *Cels.* 6.6–63, 6.69.
- [71.](#) Origen, *Cels.* 7.27. At the end of this chapter, he reiterates the text of John 4:24, which states that God is spirit and true worshipers will worship God in spirit and truth.
- [72.](#) Augustine, *Ep.* 147.26.

- [73.](#) See, for example, Augustine, *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 3.17–19.3, *Fid. symb.* 3.3, 7.14, *Trin.* 2.23, 3.20.
- [74.](#) Augustine, *Ep.* 120.7, 120.9 (his answer to *Ep.* 119).
- [75.](#) Augustine, *Conf.* 7.1 (CCSL 27: 92), trans. Henry Chadwick, *Saint Augustine: Confessions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 111.
- [76.](#) John Cassian, *Consl.* 10.1–3.
- [77.](#) Socrates, *Eccl. hist.* 6.7.
- [78.](#) Palladius, *Dial.* 6–7; Sozomen, *Eccl. hist.* 7.15, 8.11–15; Theodoret, *Eccl. hist.* 5.22; Sulpicius Severus, *Dial.* 1.6–7. See Mark DelCogliano, “Situating Sarapion’s Sorrow: The Anthropomorphite Controversy as the Historical and Theological Context of Cassian’s Tenth Conference on Pure Prayer,” *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 38, no. 4 (2003): 377–421. DelCogliano’s footnotes are excellent for further reading or research on the context of the Origenist controversy and its impact on these events. Also see the summary of the controversy in Marksches, *God’s Body*, 231–39.
- [79.](#) Evagrius, *Or.* 66 (PG 79: 1165A–1200C), trans. John E. Bamberger, *Evagrius Ponticus: “The Praktikos” and “Chapters on Prayer”* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian, 1981), 66. For an excellent discussion with helpful references to Evagrius’s works on this topic, see Columba Stewart, “Imageless Prayer and the Theological Vision of Evagrius Ponticus,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 9, no. 2 (2001): 173–204.
- [80.](#) See DelCogliano, “Situating Sarapion’s Sorrow,” 410–12, esp. 410n153 (citing Evagrius, *In Eccl.* 3), 412n177 (citing Evagrius, *De mal.* 18, 24, 27, 42).
- [81.](#) Studies of the Origenist controversy are many, but among the most comprehensive is by Elizabeth Clark, *The Origenist Controversy: The Cultural Construction of an Early Christian Debate* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).
- [82.](#) The possibility that Theophilus had a slightly earlier change of heart, following a visit from the Coptic monk Aphou of Pemdje, is discussed in DelCogliano, “Situating Sarapion’s Sorrow,” with extensive references to primary and secondary sources.
- [83.](#) DelCogliano, “Situating Sarapion’s Sorrow,” 408, has an excellent summary of the controversy and refers to Graham Gould’s argument that the anti-Origenists were never “true Anthropomorphites.” See Gould, “The Image of God and the Anthropomorphite Controversy in Fourth Century Monasticism,” in *Origeniana Quinta*, ed. R. Daly (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1992): 549–57.

- [84.](#) Cassian, *Conf.* 10.3 (SC 54: 76–78), trans. Colm Luibheid, *John Cassian: Conferences* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 127.
- [85.](#) The rest of this section anticipates the discussion of early Christian art in chap. 4.
- [86.](#) Gregory S. Aldrete, *Gestures and Acclamations in Ancient Rome* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 45–50. See also Richard Brilliant, *Gesture and Rank in Roman Art: The Use of Gestures to Denote Status in Roman Sculpture and Coinage* (New Haven: Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1963), 165–70.
- [87.](#) See A. Mercogliano, *Le basiliche paleocristiane di Cimitile* (Rome: Pontificio istituto di archeologia cristiana, 1968), 176.
- [88.](#) See Shira Lander, “Revealing and Concealing God in Ancient Synagogue Art,” in *Histories of the Hidden God: Concealment and Revelation in Western Gnostic, Esoteric, and Mystical Traditions*, ed. A. D. DeConick and G. Adamson (Durham, UK: Acumen, 2013), 205–16. See also Robert Couzin, *Right and Left in Early Christian and Medieval Art* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 22–49.
- [89.](#) Minucius Felix, *Oct.* 29.6, in response to Caecilius at 9.4.
- [90.](#) E.g., Justin Martyr, *1 Apol.* 55; Tertullian, *Apol.* 16.7, *Marc.* 4.20–24; Hippolytus (sometimes identified as Ps.-Hippolytus), *Antichr.* 59.
- [91.](#) Tertullian, *Apol.* 12, *Nat.* 1.12.
- [92.](#) See Nathan Dennis, “Visualizing Trinitarian Space in the Albenga Baptistery,” in *Perceptions of the Body and Space in Late Antiquity and Byzantium*, ed. J. Bogdanović (London: Routledge, 2018), 124–48; Mario Marcenaro, *Il battistero “monumentale” di Albenga, sedici secoli di storia: Aggiornamento con appunti sulle recenti indagini archeologiche* (Albenga: Delfino Moro, 2014).
- [93.](#) Paulinus of Nola, *Ep.* 32.10 (CSEL 29: 285–86), trans. P. G. Walsh, *Letters of St. Paulinus of Nola*, vol. 2 (New York: Newman, 1967), 145.
- [94.](#) Paulinus of Nola, *Ep.* 32.15–17. See Dennis E. Trout, *Paulinus of Nola: Life, Letters, and Poems* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 151–53, 182–83. At 151n89, Trout cites Mercogliano, *Basiliche paleocristiane*, 175–79, which summarizes art historians’ efforts to reconstruct the mosaic at Cimitile. See also Helena Junod-Ammerbauer, “Les constructions de Nole et l’esthétique de saint Paulin,” *Revue des études augustinienes* 24 (1978): 22–57.
- [95.](#) The bibliography on the development of the cult of the cross is vast, but for a broad and helpful survey see Louis van Tongeren, *Exaltation of the*

Cross: Toward the Origins of the Feast of the Cross and the Meaning of the Cross in Early Medieval Liturgy (Leuven: Peeters, 2000).

- [96.](#) Libanius, *Or.* 18.178–9; Cyril of Alexandria, *Cont. Jul.* 1 (PG 76: 508). On the problems with reconstructing Julian’s text, see Rowland Smith, *Julian’s Gods: Religion and Philosophy in the Thought and Action of Julian the Apostate* (London: Routledge, 1995), 178–79.
- [97.](#) Julian, *Cont. Gal.* 1.191–94D, text reconstructed and translated in Wilmer Cave Wright, *The Works of Emperor Julian*, vol. 3, LCL 157 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1913), 372–73. Wright apparently follows Julian, *Julianii Imperatoris Librorum contra Christianios quae supersunt*, ed. Karl J. Neumann (Leipzig: Teubner, 1880). See also the critical edition *Giuliano imperatore: Contra Galilaeos*, Testi e commenti 9, ed. Emanuela Masaracchia (Rome: Ateno, 1991).
- [98.](#) Arnobius, *Nat.* 1.37.

CHAPTER 3. EPIPHANIES

- [1.](#) Minucius Felix, *Oct.* 32.1, 32.4, 18.8.
- [2.](#) Irenaeus, *Haer.* 5.6.1, 16.2.
- [3.](#) Origen, *Hom. Gen.* 1.13, *Princ.* 1.1, *Comm. Rom.* 1.19.8, 5.1.28. For more on the issue of humans as the image of God, see Alexander Altmann, "Homo Imago Dei in Jewish and Christian Theology," *Journal of Religion* 48 (1968): 235-59.
- [4.](#) Origen, *Cels.* 6.62-63; see also *Princ.* 1.1, *Hom. Gen.* 1.13.
- [5.](#) Origen, *Cels.* 6.61-64, 7.27 (also cited in chap. 2, n. 71). For a brief summary of Origenist cosmology, especially as set out by Evagrius Ponticus, see Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism: Origins to the Fifth Century*, vol. 1 (New York: Crossroad, 2002), 146-47. On Origen's position on divine corporeality, see David Paulsen, "Early Christian Belief in a Corporeal Deity: Origen and Augustine as Reluctant Witnesses," *Harvard Theological Review* 83 (1990): 105-16.
- [6.](#) Eusebius, *Praep. ev.* 7.18.
- [7.](#) Philo, *Opif.* 136-37, *Spec.* 3.189.
- [8.](#) See Alon Goshen Gottstein, "The Body as Image of God in Rabbinic Literature," *Harvard Theological Review* 87 (1994): 171-95. Gottstein here cites Arthur Marmorstein's thesis that rabbinical schools were divided on the literal interpretation of biblical texts that describe God with human physical attributes. See Marmorstein, *Essays in Anthropomorphism*, vol. 2 of *The Old Rabbinic Doctrine of God* (London: Oxford University Press, 1937).
- [9.](#) Gottstein, "Body as Image," 173-76.
- [10.](#) Philo, *Opif.* 23.69-71; see also *Spec.* 3.189. Also noted by Eusebius, as already discussed.
- [11.](#) Philo, *Conf.* 56. See Gerhard Dellling, "The 'One Who Sees God' in Philo," in *Nourished with Peace: Studies in Hellenistic Judaism in Memory of Samuel Sandmel*, ed. F. G. Greenspan, E. Hilgert, and B. M. Mack (Chico, CA: Scholars, 1984), 27-41; Ellen Birnbaum, *The Place of Judaism in Philo's Thought: Israel, Jews, and Proselytes* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1996), esp. chaps. 2-3, 61-127.
- [12.](#) Discussed in M. Halbertal and A. Margalit, *Idolatry*, trans. Naomi Goldblum (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 46-47, citing Saul Lieberman, "Mishnath Shir ha-Shirim," a Hebrew appendix in

Gershom Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1965), 118–26.

- [13.](#) Augustine, *Div. quaest.* 51.
- [14.](#) For a brief discussion of biblical imagery of God with human features, see James Barr, “Theophany and Anthropomorphism in the Old Testament,” in *Congress Volume: Oxford 1959*, ed. G.W. Anderson et al., suppl., *Vetus Testamentum* 7 (Leiden: Brill, 1960), 31–38.
- [15.](#) Origen, *Cels.* 6.61.
- [16.](#) Origen, *Cels.* 6.62.
- [17.](#) Augustine, *Conf.* 5.10.19.
- [18.](#) Augustine, *Conf.* 6.3.4–5 (CCL 27: 76–77), trans. Henry Chadwick, *Saint Augustine: Confessions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 93–94. See also *Conf.* 13.22.32, *Gen. litt.* 3.20.
- [19.](#) For a lucid summary of the exegesis of this biblical episode as an appearance of God as either the Trinity or the Son and two angels, see Bogdan G. Bucur, “The Early Christian Reception of Genesis 18: From Theophany to Trinitarian Symbolism,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 23, no. 2 (2015): 245–72; Bucur, *Scripture Re-envisioned: Christophanic Exegesis and the Making of a Christian Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 42–70. Earlier, the biblical text briefly says that the Lord appeared to Abram when he was ninety-nine years old (Gen 17:1; see this chapter’s second epigraph).
- [20.](#) Justin Martyr, *1 Apol.* 63.
- [21.](#) Justin Martyr, *Dial.* 56.
- [22.](#) Justin Martyr, *Dial.* 57–60. This debate is explained in more detail in Robin M. Jensen, *Face to Face: The Portrait of the Divine in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 72–74.
- [23.](#) Theophilus, *Auto.* 2.17, 2.22.
- [24.](#) Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.20.5–12, *Epid.* 44–45. See also Jensen, *Face to Face*, 74–77.
- [25.](#) Tertullian, *Carn. Chr.* 3.
- [26.](#) Origen, *Princ.* 2.4.3.
- [27.](#) Origen, *Hom. Gen.* 4.
- [28.](#) Novatian might have been thinking here of Plato’s image of the prisoners released from the cave, who have to adjust gradually to the sunlight (*Rep.* 10).
- [29.](#) Novatian, *Trin.* 18–19. Note that later on, Gregory of Nyssa will speak of Moses’s encounter with God as a drawing near to darkness, which

demonstrates how far God is from human perception (*Vit. Mos.* 2.162–66).

- [30.](#) Eusebius, *Comm. Isa.* 41.
- [31.](#) Eusebius, *Dem. ev.* 5.9, 5.14.
- [32.](#) Augustine, *Ep.* 147.23–37.
- [33.](#) Augustine, *Trin.* 2.4.20–22.
- [34.](#) The next chapter discusses the emergence and subjects of Christian pictorial art in more depth.
- [35.](#) Eusebius, *Dem. ev.* 5.9.
- [36.](#) See, for example, Henri Nouwen, *Behold the Beauty of the Lord: Praying with Icons* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria, 1987), 29–44.
- [37.](#) See Robin M. Jensen, “The Economy of the Trinity at the Creation of Adam and Eve,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 7, no. 4 (1999): 527–46. On these and later early Christian Trinity images, see Jennifer Awes Freeman, *The Ashburnham Pentateuch and Its Contexts: The Trinity in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, UK: D. S. Brewer, 2022).
- [38.](#) Augustine, *Ep.* 147.12.29–13.31.
- [39.](#) Origen, *Princ.* 1.2.8.
- [40.](#) Augustine, *Ep.* 147.5.12.
- [41.](#) Athanasius, *Inc.* 11.
- [42.](#) Athanasius, *Inc.* 14.4.
- [43.](#) Athanasius, *Inc.* 14.1–4, trans. John Behr, *Athanasius: On the Incarnation*, PPS 44b (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2011), 40–41. Critical edition: *Athanasius: De incarnatione Verbi*, ed. E. P. Meijering (Amsterdam: J. C. Gieben, 1989).
- [44.](#) Athanasius, *C. gent.* 2.34.
- [45.](#) Athanasius, *Inc.* 15–16.
- [46.](#) Gregory of Nazianzus, *Adv. Eun.* 1.14; Gregory of Nyssa, *Adv. Eun.* 2; Basil of Caesarea, *Spir. sanct.* 18.45. Here Basil also makes an analogy to the emperor and the emperor’s image, a point discussed in “The Emperor’s Image” in chap. 7.
- [47.](#) Gregory of Nyssa, *De hom. opif.* 5.1–2.
- [48.](#) Basil of Caesarea, *Spir. sanct.* This assertion is discussed in more depth in chap. 6, with particular regard to painted portraits.
- [49.](#) Augustine, *Tract. Jo. Ev.* 24.1–2.
- [50.](#) Theophilus, *Auto.* 1.2.
- [51.](#) Theophilus, *Auto.* 1.3.
- [52.](#) Note also Matt 18:10, regarding the “little ones” whose angels in heaven continually see the face of God.

- [53.](#) Augustine, *Ep.* 92.
- [54.](#) Augustine, *Ep.* 147.18, 147.20, 147.22.
- [55.](#) Augustine, *Enarrat. Ps.* 75.5; see also *Trin.* 1.18.
- [56.](#) Augustine, *Civ.* 22.29 (CCSL 47: 857–58), trans. William Babcock, *The City of God*, The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, pt. 1, vol. 7 (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2013), 547.
- [57.](#) Augustine, *Civ.* 22.29 (CCSL 47: 859), trans. Babcock, *Saint Augustine*, 550.
- [58.](#) Augustine, *Ep.* 147.37.

CHAPTER 4. EARLY CHRISTIAN PICTORIAL ART

- [1.](#) On the history of catacomb exploration in the late Middle Ages and Renaissance, see John Osborne, "The Roman Catacombs in the Middle Ages," *Papers of the British School at Rome* 53 (1985): 278-328; Robert Gaston, "British Travellers and Scholars in the Roman Catacombs," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 46 (1983): 144-65.
- [2.](#) The influence of the Jewish proscription of art is perhaps most prominently associated with an essay by Theodor Klauser, "Erwägungen zur Entstehung der altchristlichen Kunst," *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 76 (1965): 1-11. Similar scholarly assessments include Leslie W. Barnard, *The Graeco-Roman and Oriental Background of the Iconoclastic Controversy* (Leiden: Brill, 1974); James Breckenridge, "The Reception of Art into the Early Church," in *Atti del IX Congresso internazionale di archeologia cristiana*, vol. 1 (Vatican City: Pontificio istituto di archeologia cristiana, 1978), 361-69, which argues for the authority of the second commandment.
- [3.](#) Ernst Kitzinger, "The Cult of Images in the Age before Iconoclasm," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 8 (1954): 85-150. See also the excellent summary of the modern scholarship in Paul Corby Finney, *The Invisible God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 7-10.
- [4.](#) Kitzinger, "Cult of Images," 88-89. See Finney, *Invisible God*, 99-105, for his critique of other arguments for early Christian aniconism, including a presumption that the earliest Christians were more "spiritual" and "otherworldly" than their pagan neighbors and later Christian art users.
- [5.](#) On Christians' presumed lack of capital, see Finney, *Invisible God*, 108.
- [6.](#) Jaś Elsner, "Archaeologies and Agendas: Reflections on Late Antique Jewish Art and Early Christian Art," *Journal of Roman Studies* 93 (2003): 114-15; Markus Vinzent, "Earliest 'Christian' Art Is Jewish Art," in *Jewish Art in Its Late Antique Context*, ed. Uzi Leibner and Catherine Hezser (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 263-77.
- [7.](#) See the excellent essay by Robert Couzin, "Syncretism and Segregation in Early Christian Art," *Studies in Iconography* 38 (2017): 18-54, esp. 22-25.
- [8.](#) See the now dated but still widely respected discussions of this subject by Janet Huskinson, "Some Pagan Mythological Figures and Their Significance in Early Christian Art," *Papers of the British School at Rome* 42 (1974): 68-97, and Mary Charles-Murray, *Rebirth and Afterlife: A Study*

of the Transmutation of Some Pagan Imagery in Early Christian Funerary Art (Oxford: BAR International Series, 1981). See also, more recently, Gisella Cantino Wataghin, "I primi cristiani, tra imagines, historiae e pictura: Spunti di riflessione," *Antiquité tardive* 19 (2011): 13-33.

- [9.](#) See Éric Rebillard, *Christians and Their Many Identities in Late Antiquity, North Africa, 200-450 CE* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012), 1-8; Christopher Jones, *Between Pagans and Christians* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 5-7.
- [10.](#) For a bibliography and discussion and of the figures in the Via Latina catacomb, see Beverly Berg, "Alcestis and Hercules in the Catacomb of Via Latina," *Vigiliae Christianae* 48, no. 3 (1994): 219-34.
- [11.](#) Theodor Klauser, "Der Beitrag der orientalischen Religionen, insbesondere des Christentums, zur spätantiken und frühmittelalterlichen Kunst," in *Atti del Convegno internazionale sul tema: Tardo antico e alto medioevo* (Rome: Accademia nazionale dei Lincei, 1968), 32-98.
- [12.](#) Robin M. Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (London: Routledge, 2000), 37-41; Walter Schumacher, *Hirt und "Guter Hirt": Studien zum Hirtenbild in der römischen Kunst vom zweiten bis zum Anfang des vierten Jahrhunderts unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Mosaiken in der Südhalle von Aquileja* (Freiburg: Herder, 1977).
- [13.](#) Many handbooks of early Christian art are available, but for recent overviews with brief bibliographies see Norbert Zimmerman, "Catacomb Painting and the Rise of Christian Iconography," and Jutta Dresken-Weiland, "Christian Sarcophagi from Rome," in *The Routledge Handbook of Early Christian Art*, ed. R. Jensen and M. Ellison (London: Routledge, 2018), 21-55; Jeffrey Spier, ed., *Picturing the Bible: The Earliest Christian Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), with introductory essays by several art historians and a useful catalog of objects.
- [14.](#) Clement of Alexandria, *Paed* 3.11.59 (SC 158: 124-25), trans. Simon P. Wood, *Clement of Alexandria: Christ the Educator* (Washington, DC: Catholic University Press, 1954), 246. Compare Clement's comments on simple, undecorated attire in *Paed*. 3.11. See also James Francis, "Clement of Alexandria on Signet Rings: Reading an Image at the Dawn of Christian Art," *Classical Philology* 98 (2003): 179-83; Paul Corby Finney, "Images on Finger Rings and Early Christian Art," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 41 (1987): 181-86.
- [15.](#) Finney, *Invisible God*, 111.

- [16.](#) On images like the dove, the peacock, the dolphin, and harvesting grapes or wheat, see Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art*, 59–63.
- [17.](#) Fabrizio Bisconti, “The Emergence of Christian Art: Old Themes and New Meanings,” in *Transition to Christianity: Art of Late Antiquity, 3rd–7th Century ad*, ed. A. Lazaridou (New York: Onassis Foundation, 2011), 58–60.
- [18.](#) Gerhard Rodenwaldt proposed this regarding Christian sarcophagi in particular in “Eine spätantike Kunstströmung in Rom,” *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Römische Abteilung* 36–37 (1921–22): 58–110, esp. 69. See also, more recently, Elsner, “Archaeologies and Agendas.”
- [19.](#) See Jeffrey Spier, “Engraved Gems and Amulets,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Early Christian Art*, ed. R. Jensen and M. Ellison (London: Routledge, 2018), 141–49.
- [20.](#) Tertullian, *Pud.* 7.1–4.
- [21.](#) Emphasized by Norbert Zimmerman in “The Healing Christ in Early Christian Funeral Art: The Example of the Frescoes at Domitilla Catacomb/Rome,” in *Miracles Revisited: New Testament Miracle Stories and Their Concepts of Reality*, ed. S. Alkier and A. Weissenrieder (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), 251–74.
- [22.](#) See Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, trans. E. Jephcott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), xxi–xxii, 9.
- [23.](#) See Robert Couzin, “‘Early’ ‘Christian’ ‘Art,’” in *The Routledge Handbook of Early Christian Art*, ed. R. Jensen and M. Ellison (London: Routledge, 2018), 380–92, citing Anthony Cutler, “The Right Hand’s Cunning: Craftsmanship and the Demand for Art in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages,” *Speculum* 72 (1997): 974.
- [24.](#) Cyril of Alexandria, *Ep.* 41.22 (ACO 1.1.4: 40–48), trans. John I. McEnerney, *St. Cyril of Alexandria: Letters 1–50* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1987), 181, slightly adapted.
- [25.](#) Discussed by Jutta Dresken-Weiland, “Bilder im Grab und ihre Bedeutung im Kontext der Christianisierung der frühchristlichen Welt,” *Antiquité tardive* 19 (2011): 63–78.
- [26.](#) On the significance of frontality in portraits see Meyer Schapiro, *Words, Script, and Pictures: Semiotics of Visual Language* (New York: George Braziller, 1996), 69–95.
- [27.](#) Studies of portraits in late antiquity are too numerous to cite here, but for a general survey see Jane Fejfer, *Roman Portraits in Context* (Berlin: De

- Gruyter, 2007).
- [28.](#) Dio Cassius 60.5.4–5.
 - [29.](#) See Clifford Ando, *The Matter of the Gods: Religion and the Roman Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 22–27; Burkhard Gladigow, “Präsenz der Bilder—Präsenz der Götter: Kultbilder und Bilder der Götter in der griechischen Religion,” *Visible Religion* 4–5 (1985–86): 114–33.
 - [30.](#) Eric Varner, *Mutilation and Transformation: “Damnatio Memoriae” and Roman Imperial Portraiture*, *Monumenta graeca et romana* 10 (Leiden: Brill, 2004). On Christian attitudes toward imperial portraits, see “The Emperor’s Image” in chap. 7.
 - [31.](#) *Acta Apoll.* 14.
 - [32.](#) *Acta Pion.* 4, trans. Herbert Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), 143.
 - [33.](#) *Acta Dasius* 5, trans. Musurillo, *Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 275.
 - [34.](#) See Paolo Liverani, “The Sunset of 3D” in *The Afterlife of Greek and Roman Sculpture*, ed. T.M. Kristensen and L. Stirling (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016), 310–29; Helen Saradi-Mendelovici, “Christian Attitudes toward Pagan Monuments in Late Antiquity and Their Legacy in Later Byzantine Centuries,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 44 (1990): 47–61; Michael Peppard, “Was the Presence of Christ in Statues? The Challenge of Divine Media for a Jewish Roman God,” in *The Art of Empire: Christian Art in Its Imperial Context*, ed. L. M. Jefferson and R. M. Jensen (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 225–70.
 - [35.](#) See, e.g., Justin Martyr, *1 Apol.* 9; Minucius Felix, *Oct.* 24.8. Christians were not so critical of honorific portraits of emperors or other important persons.
 - [36.](#) On the treatment of gods’ statues, see Jörg Rüpke, *Religion of the Romans*, trans. and ed. R. Gordon (Malden, MA: Polity, 2007), 97–106; Burkhard Gladigow, “Zur Ikonographie und Pragmatik römischen Kultbilder,” in *Iconologia Sacra: Mythos, Bildkunst und Dichtung in der Religions- und Sozialgeschichte Alteuropas—Festschrift für Karl Hauck zum 75. Geburtstag*, ed. H. Keller and N. Staubach (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1994), 9–24.
 - [37.](#) See Heidi J. Hornik, “Freestanding Sculpture,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Early Christian Art*, ed. R. Jensen and M. Ellison (London: Routledge, 2018), 73–85; Katherine Marsengill, “The Christian Reception of Sculpture in Late Antiquity and the Historical Reception of Late Antique Christian Sculpture,” *Journal of the Bible and Its Reception* 1 (2014): 67–

- 101; Bente Killerich, "Sculpture in the Round in the Early Byzantine Period: Constantinople and the East," in *Aspects of Late Antiquity and Early Byzantium*, ed. L. Rydén and J. O. Rosenqvist (Stockholm: Swedish Research Institute, 1993), 85-97.
- [38.](#) The Hippolytus sculpture appears to have been reconstructed, probably from a personification of one of the sciences or wisdom or a Roman philosopher portrait. See Alan Brent, *Hippolytus and the Roman Church in the Third Century: Communities in Tension before the Emergence of a Monarch-Bishop* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), chaps. 1-2. The so-called Christ statuette in the Museo Nazionale Romano (Terme) was originally identified as a seated poetess but reidentified on the basis of its similarity to depictions of Christ on fourth-century sarcophagi. See Oskar Thulin, "Die Christus-Statuette im Museo Nazionale Romano," *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Römische Abteilung* 44 (1929): 201-59; summary of scholarly assessments in Niels Hannestad, "How Did Rising Christianity Cope with Pagan Sculpture?," in *East and West: Modes of Communication*, ed. Evangelos Chrysos and Ian Wood (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 173-75.
- [39.](#) Eusebius, *Vit. Const.* 3.49.
- [40.](#) Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 7.18.
- [41.](#) This may once have been an image of Hadrian with Judaea Capta, according to John F. Wilson, "The 'Statue of Christ' at Banias: A Saga of Pagan-Christian Confrontation in 4th Century Syro-Palestine," *ARAM Periodical* 18-19 (2006): 1-11. See also Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi: Banias, the Lost City of Pan* (London: I. B. Tauris: 2004), 93.
- [42.](#) Sozomen, *Hist.* 5.21; Rufinus, *Hist.* 7.18.2 (a rather loose translation of Eusebius); Gregory of Tours, *Glor. mar.* 20; John Malalas, *Chron.*, 10.12, *Parastaseis syntomoi chronikai* 48.
- [43.](#) According to Malalas, however, Julian destroyed the healed woman's statue himself (*Parastaseis* 48).
- [44.](#) Philostorgius, *Hist.* 7.3. From this point, Philostorgius follows Sozomen regarding the statue's desecration under Julian, although not crediting it specifically to the emperor.
- [45.](#) Gregory of Nazianzus, *Or.* 18.39.
- [46.](#) *Lib. pont.* 34.9-13. Among many scholarly evaluations of the Lateran fastigium, see Sible de Blaauw, "Das Fastigium der Lateranbasilika: Schöpferische Innovation, Unikat oder Paradigma," in *Innovation in der Spätantike: Kolloquium Basel 6. und 9. Mai 1994*, ed. B. Brenk (Wiesbaden:

Reichert, 1996), 53–65; Olof Brandt, “Deer, Lambs, and Water in the Lateran Baptistery,” *Rivista di archeologia cristiana* 81 (2005): 131–56. The Constantinian gift of the fastigium has been questioned by historians, who have argued that it more likely belongs to a later period, given perhaps by one of Constantine’s sons or a sixth-century pope. See Robert Grigg, “Constantine the Great and The Cult without Images,” *Viator* 8 (1977): 1–32; Rosamond McKitterick, “The Constantinian Basilica in the Early Medieval *Liber Pontificalis*,” in *The Basilica of Saint John Lateran to 1600*, ed. L. Bosman, I. P. Haynes, and P. Liverani (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 197–220.

- [47.](#) Sible de Blaauw refers to these statues as an “experiment” that “failed” in “Imperial Connotations in Roman Church Interiors: The Significance and Effect of the Lateran *Fastigium*,” in *Imperial Art as Christian Art, Christian Art as Imperial Art: Expression and Meaning in Art and Architecture from Constantinian to Justinian*, ed. J. R. Brandt and O. Steen (Rome: Bardi, 2001), 137–46, esp. 141, 144.
- [48.](#) E.g., Jaś Elsner, “Perspectives in Art,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Constantine*, ed. N. Lenski (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 255–77, esp. 266; Beat Brenk, *The Apse, the Image, and the Icon: An Historical Perspective of the Apse as a Space for Images* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2010), 31–33. *Lib. pont.* 46.4 (Sixtus), however, reports that at the bishop’s request, the emperor Valentinian restored the Constantinian basilica’s silver fastigium, which barbarians had seized.
- [49.](#) Eusebius, *Vit. Const.* 3.54, trans. Averil Cameron and Stuart G. Hall, *Eusebius: Life of Constantine* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1999), 143. Critical edition: *Eusebius Werke, Teil 1: Über das Leben des Kaisers Konstantin*, 2nd ed., GCS, ed. Friedhelm Winkelmann (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1991). See also Eusebius, *Laud. Const.* 9.
- [50.](#) For a brief but illuminating study, see Katherine Marsengill, “Panel Paintings and Early Christian Icons,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Early Christian Art*, ed. R. Jensen and M. Ellison (London: Routledge, 2018), 191–206.
- [51.](#) See H. P. L’Orange, “Plotinus-Paul,” in *Likeness and Icon: Selected Studies in Classical and Early Mediaeval Art* (Odense: Odense University Press, 1973), 32–42. On portraits of Paul generally, see Robin M. Jensen, “Paul in Art,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Paul*, ed. Stephen Westerholm (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 507–30. Note the comment, in the *Letter to Constantia* commonly attributed to Eusebius, that Christ and Paul

were shown in the guise of philosophers (see “Fourth-Century Critique” in chap. 5).

- [52.](#) A discussion of the possible reasons for these variances in the depiction of Christ follows in chap. 6.
- [53.](#) E.g., Paul Speck, “Wunderheilige und Bilder: Zur Frage des Beginns der Bilderverehrung,” *Poikila byzantina* 3, varia 3 (1991): 163–247. esp. 164, 227; Richard Price, “Icons before and during Iconoclasm,” https://www.academia.edu/20430402/Icons_before_and_during_Iconoclasm, 2–3; Leslie Brubaker and John Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 36.
- [54.](#) Katherine Marsengill, *Portraits and Icons: Between Reality and Spirituality in Byzantine Art* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), 25–28. Marsengill goes on to give examples of devotional images.
- [55.](#) Kitzinger, “Cult of Images,” 89.

CHAPTER 5. HOLY PORTRAITS

- [1.](#) The rise of the cult of relics in tandem with the emergence of holy portraits is discussed in chap. 7.
- [2.](#) This document's complicated textual history makes it difficult to establish a reliable date for the cited section, although scholarly consensus usually accepts one between the mid-second and mid-third century. This section was, however, given as evidence of the apostle John's repudiation of icons at the iconoclastic Council of Hieria in 754 and at the Second Council of Nicaea in 787. On the dating and construction of the whole document, see Janet E. Spittler, "John, Acts of," in *Brill Encyclopedia of Early Christianity* (online), ed. David G. Hunter, Paul J.J. van Geest, and Bert Jan Lietaert Peerbolte, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2589-7993_EECO_SIM_00001801; Spittler, "Is Vienna Hist. Gr. 63, Fol. 51v-55v a 'Fragment'?", *Ancient Jew Review*, May 6, 2019, <https://www.ancientjewreview.com/read/2019/4/30/is-vienna-hist-gr-63-fol-51v-55v-a-fragment>.
- [3.](#) *Acts John* 19-27. Porphyry, *Vit. Plot.* 1 tells a similar story about Plotinus refusing to allow his portrait to be made because it would be only an image of an image.
- [4.](#) Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.25.6. On Marcellina and with discussion of the Carpocratians' alleged images, see Gregory Snyder, "'She Destroyed Multitudes': Marcellina's Group in Rome," in *Women and Knowledge in Early Christianity*, ed. Ulla Tervahauta et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 39-61. See also Paul Corby Finney, "Alcune note a proposito delle immagini carpocraziane di Gesù," *Rivista di archeologia cristiana* 57 (1981): 35-41.
- [5.](#) Hippolytus, *Ref.* 7.32.7. Recent scholarship has challenged the attribution to Hippolytus of Rome, so it may be better to identify the author as Pseudo-Hippolytus. See the edition and translation by M. David Litwa, *Hippolytus: Refutation of All Heresies*, WGRW 40 (Atlanta: SBL, 2016).
- [6.](#) Epiphanius, *Pan.* 27.6.9-10.
- [7.](#) Piacenza Pilgrim, *Itin.* 23.
- [8.](#) *Hist. Aug. Sev. Alex.* 29.2-3, 31.4.
- [9.](#) *Hist. Aug. Sev. Alex.* 43.6-7, with more evidence of the emperor's Christian sympathies at 22.4, 45.7, 49.6, 51.7-8.
- [10.](#) For more on the controversy surrounding this work, see Robert Browning, "Biography," in *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature*, vol. 2, *Latin*

Literature, ed. E.J. Kenney and W.V. Clausen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 723–31, esp. 724–27.

- [11.](#) *Hist. Aug. Hel.* 3.5 reports that Alexander's immediate predecessor, Elagabalus, incorporated the religions of Christians, Jews, and Samaritans in his temple to the god Elagabalus in Rome, and this would presumably include an image of Jesus. According to Eusebius of Caesarea (*Hist. eccl.* 6.21.3–4), Alexander's mother, Julia Mamaea, "a most pious woman," called upon the Christian Origen of Alexandria to discuss religious subjects, which lends some credence to the possibility that the Severan emperors had an image of Christ in their private pantheon.
- [12.](#) Suggested by Robert Couzin, "Syncretism and Segregation in Early Christian Art," *Studies in Iconography* 38 (2017): 22.
- [13.](#) Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 7.18.4. See also the discussion in "Avoiding the Cultic Gaze" in chap. 4.
- [14.](#) These dates are somewhat controversial; some scholars believe that certain canons, including the discussed here, should be dated to the late fourth century. One of these is Maurice Meigne, whose "Concil ou collection d'Elvire?," *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 70 (1975): 361–87, argues that the canons were compiled at a later date, with the first twenty-one from the beginning of the fourth century and the others from afterward. For more on this dispute and a summary of different scholarly views, see G.E.M. de Ste. Croix, *Christian Persecution, Martyrdom, and Orthodoxy*, ed. Michael Whitby and Joseph Streeter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 79–104.
- [15.](#) "Placuit picturas in ecclesia esse non debere, ne quod colitur et adoratur in parietibus depingatur." Text and translation in Charles Joseph Hefele, *A History of the Christian Councils*, ed. and trans. W. Clark, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (London: T&T Clark, 1894), 151. See also José Vives, ed., *Concilios visigóticos e hispano-romanos*, España cristiana: textos 1 (Barcelona: Consejo superior de investigaciones científicas, 1963), 78.
- [16.](#) Translation variants are discussed by Edwin Bevan, *Holy Images: An Inquiry into Idolatry and Image-Worship in Ancient Paganism and in Christianity* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1940), 114–15; Mary Charles-Murray, "Art and the Early Church," *Journal of Theological Studies*, n.s. 28 (1977): 317n2.
- [17.](#) Eusebius, *Letter to Constantia* (PG 20: 1545–49), trans. Cyril A. Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire, 312–1453: Sources and Documents* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 17. Critical edition: Jean-

Baptiste Pitra, ed., *Spicilegium solesmense: Complectens sanctorum patrum scriptorumque ecclesiasticorum anecdota hactenus opera* (Paris: Didot, 1852-58), 1:383-86.

- [18.](#) Fragments are included in the iconoclasts' *Horos* (Epitome) of 754, and some sections were quoted at the Second Council of Nicaea and refuted by Nicephorus in his *Contra Eusebium*. See Pitra, *Spicilegium solesmense*, 1:371-503.
- [19.](#) See Claudia Sode and Paul Speck, "Ikonoklasmus vor der Zeit? Der Brief des Eusebios von Kaisareia an Kaiserin Konstantia," *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 54 (2004): 113-34. Among those who have questioned the authenticity of this letter are Charles-Murray, in "Art and the Early Church," 335-36, but she revised her opinion based on the challenge by Stephen Gero, "The True Image of Christ: Eusebius' Letter to Constantia Reconsidered," *Journal of Theological Studies*, n.s. 32 (1981): 460-70. Gero's support for authenticity is on the basis of style and vocabulary, which a good forger could obviously copy. Some who presume that the letter is genuinely Eusebian include George Florovsky, "Origen, Eusebius, and the Iconoclastic Controversy," *Church History* 19, no. 2 (1950): 77-96, who insists there is "no reason whatsoever to question its authenticity" (84); Christoph von Schönborn, *God's Human Face: The Christ-Icon*, trans. L. Krauth (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1994), 57-59, who simply takes this for granted. See also Charles Barber, *Figure and Likeness: On the Limits of Representation in Byzantine Iconoclasm* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 86-87. Among the scholars who dismiss the letter's authenticity are Timothy Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 401n82; Steven Bigham, *Early Christian Attitudes toward Images* (Rollingsford, NH: Orthodox Research Institute, 2004), 193-99.
- [20.](#) Excerpted translations in Mango, *Art of the Byzantine Empire*, 41-43; more recently, Steven Bigham, *Epiphanius of Salamis: Doctor of Iconoclasm? Deconstruction of a Myth* (Rollingsford, NH: Orthodox Research Institute, 2008), 11-21. Some of these fragments are found in the original language: see, e.g., PG 82: 1473; Georg Ostrogorsky's modern edition *Studien zur Geschichte des byzantinischen Bilderstreits*, Historische Untersuchungen 5 (Breslau: Marcus, 1929), 61-113, which identifies these works as "pseudo-epiphanischen Schriften."
- [21.](#) Among those who endorse the works' authenticity are Karl Holl, "Die Schriften des Epiphanius gegen die Bilderverehrung," *Gesammelte*

Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte, Band 2, *Der Osten* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1916), 351–87; Ernst Kitzinger, “The Cult of Images in the Age before Iconoclasm,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 8 (1954): 93n28; Charles-Murray, “Art and Early Church,” 336–38, which outlines the discussion up to the time of her writing and notes that Ostrogorsky initially accepted only the *Treatise* as authentic but after severe critique allowed that the *Letter to John of Jerusalem* could be as well (his change of mind is evident in his *Studien*, 61–113); Paul J. Alexander, “Church Councils and Patristic Authority: The Iconoclastic Council of Hiereia (754) and St. Sophia (815),” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 63 (1958): 493–505; Pierre Maraval, “Épiphanie, ‘Docteur des iconoclastes,’” in *Nicée II, 787–1987: Douze siècles d’images religieuses*, ed. F. Boespflug and N. Lossky (Paris: Cerf, 1987), 51–62. A reasonably fair summary of other scholars’ views, including those of John Meyendorff, George Florovsky, Jaroslav Pelikan, and Istvan Bugar, may be found in Bigham, *Epiphanius of Salamis*, 47–84. See also, more recently, Olga Solovieva, “Epiphanius of Salamis between Church and State: New Perspectives on the Iconoclastic Fragments,” *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum* 16 (2012): 344–67, which characterizes Epiphanius’s work as generally iconoclastic and anti-imperial.

- [22.](#) John of Damascus, *Orat.* 1.25; Theodore the Studite, *Ref.* 2.49. In session 6 of the Seventh Ecumenical Council (Nicaea II), the definition of the Iconoclastic Council of 754 was read out, including a “spurious” passage from Epiphanius and Eusebius’s *Letter to Constantia*.
- [23.](#) Nicephorus, *Adv. Epi.* (Pitra, *Spicilegium solesmense*, 4:292–380; Pitra considers the *Antirrhetica* and the *Adversus Epiphaniidem* to be separate documents). On Nicephorus’s work see also Paul J. Alexander, *The Patriarch Nicephorus of Constantinople: Ecclesiastical Policy and Image Worship in the Byzantine Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958).
- [24.](#) See Leslie Brubaker and John Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 46–47.
- [25.](#) Nicephorus, *Adv. Epi.* 18.79 (Ostrogorsky, *Studien*, 71–72), citing Epiphanius’s so-called *Letter to the Emperor Theodosius*, trans. Mango, *Art of the Byzantine Empire*, 42.
- [26.](#) Epiphanius, *Treatise*, trans. Mango, *Art of the Byzantine Empire*, 41.
- [27.](#) Jerome, *Ep.* 51. See discussion by Paul Maas, “Die ikonoklastische Episode in dem Brief des Epiphanius an Johannes,” *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 30 (1929–30): 279–86.

- [28.](#) For more discussion of the debate from the side of authenticity, as well as for the arguments for forgery, see Bigham, *Epiphanius of Salamis*, 48–57.
- [29.](#) Epiphanius, *Letter to the Emperor Theodosius* (Ostrogorsky, *Studien*, 67, frag. 2), trans. Mango, *Art of the Byzantine Empire*, 42–43.
- [30.](#) John Chrysostom, *Hom. enc. in Melitium* 3, trans. Efthymios Rizos, “Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity” (website), <http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk/record.php?recid=E02056>.
- [31.](#) Gregory of Nyssa, *Or. Melit.*
- [32.](#) Gregory of Nyssa, *Laud. Theod.* This work has also been attributed to John Chrysostom.
- [33.](#) Pseudo-Basil, *Hom.* 17 (PG 31: 484–89), trans. Rizos, “Cult of Saints,” <http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk/record.php?recid=E00672>.
- [34.](#) Basil of Caesarea, *Hom.* 19.2 (PG 31: 508–26), trans. Henry Maguire, *Art and Eloquence in Byzantium* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 9. See also Rizos, “Cult of Saints,” <http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk/record.php?recid=E00718>.
- [35.](#) Asterius of Amasea, trans. Boudewijn Dehandschutter in Johan Leemans et al., *‘Let Us Die That We May Live’: Greek Homilies on Christian Martyrs from Asia Minor, Palestine and Syria (c. ad 350–ad 450)* (London: Routledge, 2003), 173–76. See also Elizabeth Castelli, “Asterius of Amasea: Ekphrasis on the Holy Martyr Euphemia,” in *Religions of Late Antiquity in Practice*, ed. R. Valantasis (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 462–81; Mango, *Art of the Byzantine Empire*, 37–39. For discussion of Asterius’s description of the scene’s effect on him, see Patricia Cox Miller, “Visceral Seeing: The Holy Body in Late Ancient Christianity,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 12 (2004): 391–411; Miller, “‘The Little Blue Flower Is Red’: Relics and the Poetizing of the Body,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 8 (2000): 213–36, esp. 221–22.
- [36.](#) Prudentius, *Peri.* 9.9–12, trans. Len Krisak, *Prudentius’s Crown of Martyrs* (London: Routledge, 2019), 100.
- [37.](#) Prudentius, *Peri.* 11.125–34.
- [38.](#) Prudentius, *Peri.* 3.74–78. See a parallel in the story of Vincent at 6.73–78.
- [39.](#) Prudentius, *Peri.* 10.
- [40.](#) Prudentius, *Peri.* 10.265–70, trans. H. J. Thomson, *Prudentius*, vol. 2, LCL 398 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953), 249. On this poem see Paula Herschkowitz, *Prudentius, Spain, and Late Antique Christianity: Poetry, Visual Culture, and the Cult of Martyrs* (Cambridge: Cambridge

University Press, 2017), 162–63, where she notes the irony of Prudentius’s critique of art. See also Miller, “‘Little Blue Flower,’” 222–27.

- [41.](#) Hershkowitz also questions whether such murals could have existed but then counts the abbreviated iconography from the catacombs as parallels, which seems to be a stretch (*Prudentius, Spain*, 151–59). However, he also refers to Lawrence Nees, who argues that Prudentius’s descriptions are unparalleled in Christian art. See Nees, *Early Medieval Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 201–11.
- [42.](#) Important examples of pre-Christian ekphrases include Lucian’s *Images*, Philostratus of Lemnos’s *Eikones*, and Catullus’s poem 64.
- [43.](#) The three- and four-part narrative images of Jonah from the third and fourth centuries (see chap. 4), a few early sarcophagus friezes showing the Israelites’ exodus from Egypt, and the fifth-century monumental pictorial cycle of Old Testament stories in Santa Maria Maggiore are exceptions.
- [44.](#) Following the suggestion of Michael Roberts, *Poetry and the Cult of the Martyrs: The “Liber Peristephanon” of Prudentius* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 136.
- [45.](#) On the subject of ekphrasis and its role and intended effects, see Lucy Grig, *Making Martyrs in Late Antiquity* (London: Duckworth, 2004), 111–18. Grig here also discusses the play between texts and images.
- [46.](#) Roberts, “*Liber Peristephanon*,” 138.
- [47.](#) Augustine, *Serm.* 316.5, noted in Roberts, “*Liber Peristephanon*,” 138n14.
- [48.](#) On this iconography of martyrdom in the Basilicas of Giovanni and Paolo and of Nereus and Achilleus, see Felicity Harley-McGowan, “From Victim to Victor: Developing an Iconography of Suffering in Early Christian Art,” in *The Art of Empire: Christian Art in Its Imperial Context*, ed. L. M. Jefferson and R. M. Jensen (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 143–49; Ana Munk, “Domestic Piety in Fourth Century Rome: A Relic Shrine beneath the Church of SS. Giovanni e Paolo,” *Hortus artium medievalium* 15, no. 1 (2009): 7–19.
- [49.](#) On the lack of crucifixion imagery see Robin M. Jensen, *The Cross: History, Art, and Controversy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), 74–96.
- [50.](#) See Gillian Mackie, “Symbolism and Purpose in an Early Christian Martyr Chapel: The Case of San Vittore in Ciel d’Oro, Milan,” *Gesta* 34, no. 2 (1995): 91–101. This chapel, used by Saint Ambrose for the burial of his brother, Satyrus, also has mosaic images of Saints Maternus, Felix, Nabor, Gervasius, Protasius, and Ambrose himself on the walls.

- [51.](#) Augustine, *Mor. eccl.* 1.34.
- [52.](#) Augustine, *Serm.* 198.10 (Dolbeau 26). He may have been referring to the text of Lev 26:1, "You shall make for yourselves no idols and erect no carved images on pillars."
- [53.](#) Augustine, *Cons.* 1.10.15–16. See Goulven Madec, "Le Christ des païens d'après le *De consensu euangelistarum* de saint Augustin," *Recherches augustinienes* 26 (1992): 3–67, esp. 46–47.
- [54.](#) See Robert Couzin, *The "Traditio Legis": Anatomy of an Image* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2015).
- [55.](#) Augustine, *Trin.* 8.7 (CCSL 50: 49), trans. Edmund Hill, *The Trinity, The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, pt. 1, vol. 5 (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1991), 248–49.
- [56.](#) Paulinus, *Carm.* 27.511–95. See also Dennis E. Trout, *Paulinus of Nola: Life, Letters, and Poems* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 182–83.
- [57.](#) Paulinus, *Ep.* 32.2–4.
- [58.](#) See Celia Chazelle, "Pictures, Books, and the Illiterate: Pope Gregory I's Letters to Serenus of Marseilles," *Word and Image* 6 (1990): 138–53; Lawrence Duggan, "Was Art Really the 'Book of the Illiterate'?", *Word and Image* 5, no. 3 (1989): 227–51.
- [59.](#) Gregory the Great, *Ep.* 9.209 (CCSL 140A: 768), trans. John R. C. Martyn, *The Letters of Gregory the Great*, 3 vols. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2004), 2:674. The Latin reads, "Idcirco enim pictura in ecclesiis adhibetur, ut hi qui litteras nesciunt saltem in parietibus uidendo legant, quae legere in codicibus non ualent."
- [60.](#) Gregory the Great, *Ep.* 11.10 (CCSL 140A: 874): "Perlatum siquidem ad nos fuerat quod inconsiderate zelo succensus sanctorum imagines sub hac quasi excusatione, ne adorari debuissent, confringeres. . . . Aliud est enim adorare, aliud per picturae historiam quid sit adorandum addiscere. Nam quod legentibus scriptura, hoc idiotis praestat pictura cernentibus, quia in ipsa ignorantes uident quod qui debeant, in ipse legunt qui litteras nesciunt; unde praecipue gentibus pro lectione picture est."
- [61.](#) For the text see F. Diekamp, ed., *Analecta patristica: Texte und Abhandlungen zur griechischen Patristik*, Orientalia christiana anallecta 117 (Rome: Pontificio institutum orientalium studiorum, 1938), 127–29; trans. Mango, *Art of the Byzantine Empire*, 116–17. Secondary sources include P.J. Alexander, "Hypatius of Ephesus: A Note on Image Worship in the Sixth Century," *Harvard Theological Review* 45 (1952): 177–84;

Stephen Gero, "Hypatius of Ephesus on the Cult of Image," in *Christianity, Judaism, and Other Greco-Roman Cults: Studies for Morton Smith at Sixty*, ed. J. Neusner, pt. 2, *Early Christianity* (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 208-16.

- [62.](#) See the brief analysis of Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium*, 48-49, where the authors conclude, "The doubts [about the letter's authenticity] seem to us to be well-grounded." For Paul Speck's redating see his "Γραφαῖς ἡ γλυφαῖς: On the Fragment of Hypatios of Ephesos on Images, with an Appendix on the *Dialogue with a Jew* by Leontios of Neapolis," trans. Sarolta Takács, in Speck, *Understanding Byzantium: Studies in Byzantine Historical Sources*, ed. Takács (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 50-83.
- [63.](#) Beautifully photographed and discussed in the two-volume work of Ann Terry and Henry Maguire, *Dynamic Splendor: The Wall Mosaics in the Cathedral of Euphrasius at Poreč* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007).

CHAPTER 6. THE TRUE LIKENESS

1. G. D. Mansi, ed., *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, vol. 13 (Paris: Hubert Welter, 1902), cols. 164–65; H. G. Thümmel, *Die Frühgeschichte der östkirchlichen Bilderlehre: Texte und Untersuchungen zur Zeit vor dem Bilderstreit*, Texte und Untersuchungen 139 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1992), 327–28. On this text see Glenn Peers, “Imagination and Angelic Epiphany,” *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 21 (1997): 113–31.
2. See, for example, Minucius Felix, *Oct.* 24.7. Tertullian, *Idol.* 3.3–4 adds woven images but does not mention two-dimensional paintings.
3. See Thomas Mathews, *The Clash of Gods: A Reinterpretation of Christian Art*, rev. ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 177–90; more recently, Mathews, *The Dawn of Christian Art in Panel Painting and Icons*, with Norman E. Muller (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2016), which notes the similarities between paintings of Christian saints and the well-known Fayum portraits from Egypt. See also Katherine Marsengill, *Portraits and Icons: Between Reality and Spirituality in Byzantine Art* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), 35–39.
4. Thomas Mathews and Norman Muller, “Isis and Mary in Early Icons,” in *Images of the Mother of God: Perceptions of the Theotokos in Byzantium*, ed. M. Vassiliki (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 3–11; Mathews, *Dawn of Christian Art*, 153–68.
5. Robin Cormack, *Icons* (London: British Museum Press, 2007), 67.
6. Siri Sande makes this case in “Pagan Pinakes and Christian Icons: Continuity or Parallelism?,” *Acta ad archeologiam et artium historiam pertinentia* 18 (2003): 81–100. In Sande’s estimation, the panel paintings of pagan gods that Thomas Mathews describes in “The Emperor and the Icon,” *Acta ad archeologiam et artium historiam pertinentia* 15 (2001): 163–77, are better understood as votive gifts offered to those deities than as cult images for veneration.
7. Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 12.44–47. Noted in “The Problem of Anthropomorphism,” chap. 2.
8. Augustine, *Trin.* 8.7. See “Fifth- and Sixth-Century Acceptance and Application” in chap. 5.
9. Epiphanius, *Letter to the Emperor Theodosius*, as noted in chap. 5.

- [10.](#) Minucius Felix, *Oct.* 22.6; Arnobius, *Nat.* 6.10. See “The Problem of Anthropomorphism” in chap. 2.
- [11.](#) See Margaret M. Mitchell, “The Archetypal Image: John Chrysostom’s Portraits of Paul,” *Journal of Religion* 75 (1995): 15–43.
- [12.](#) John Chrysostom, *Hom. in Rom.*, arg. 1 (PG 60: 392), trans. J. B. Morris, *The Homilies of S. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, on the Epistle of S. Paul the Apostle to the Romans* (Oxford: Parker, 1841), 1. Mitchell points out that a clear feeling, while reading a work, as if the author were audibly or visibly present is a common trope in classical artistic-literary theory. See “Archetypal Image,” 19–20, 20n19. According to John of Damascus, *Treatise* 3.54, Chrysostom kept a portrait of Paul on his desk.
- [13.](#) John Chrysostom, *Hom. Ac.* 30, trans. Charles Marriott, *The Homilies of S. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, on the Acts of the Apostles*, pt. 2 (Oxford: Parker, 1852), 427–28, cited in Mitchell, “Archetypal Image,” 26n49.
- [14.](#) Basil of Caesarea, *Ep.* 2.3 (to Gregory of Nazianzus), trans. Roy J. Defarrari, *Saint Basil: The Letters*, vol. 1, LCL (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961), 17 (volume includes Greek edition).
- [15.](#) See James Breckenridge, *Likeness: A Conceptual History of Ancient Portraiture* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 236–51.
- [16.](#) Henry Maguire, *The Icons of Their Bodies: Saints and Their Images in Byzantium* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 5.
- [17.](#) See Gilbert Dagron, “Holy Images and Likenesses,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 45 (1991): 23–33, esp. 23–24.
- [18.](#) André Grabar, *Christian Iconography: A Study of Its Origins* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), 62 (in a chapter focused on the portrait).
- [19.](#) A good discussion of this distinction can be found in Marsengill, *Portraits and Icons*, 2–5.
- [20.](#) See Irene Kabala, “Halo,” in *The Eerdmans Encyclopedia of Early Christian Art and Archaeology*, vol. 1, ed. P. C. Finney (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2017), 627–28.
- [21.](#) Paulinus, *Ep.* 32.
- [22.](#) Basil of Caesarea, *Ep.* 2.3.
- [23.](#) See Dagron, “Holy Images and Likenesses.”
- [24.](#) The first surviving text that mentions Saint Luke painting the Virgin comes from Andrew of Crete, *De sanctarum imaginum veneratione* (PG 97: 304).

On the Holy Face of Lucca, see the Latin legend *De inventione, revelatione ac translatione sanctissimi vultus venerabilis*, which dates to the late eleventh or twelfth century.

- [25.](#) Text in Boninus Mombritius, *Sanctuarium seu vitae sanctorum*, with additions and corrections by A. Brunet and H. Quentin, vol. 2 (Paris: Fontemoing, 1910), 508–31. See also Wilhelm Pohlkamp, “Kaiser Konstantin, der heidnische und der christliche Kult in den Actus Silvestri,” *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 18 (1984): 357–400.
- [26.](#) *Mir. s. Dem.* 1225B, 1232A, 1252C, 1268A, 1301A, 1324B, 1341BC, cited in Peter Brown, *Society and the Holy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 276. See also Richard Price, “Icons before and after Iconoclasm,” https://www.academia.edu/20430402/Icons_before_and_during_Iconoclasm, 5n20, citing Paul Lemerle, ed., *Les plus anciens recueils des miracles de saint Démétrius*, vol. 1 (Paris: Éditions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1979), 102, 115, 162 (*Miracula sancti Demetrii* 1.8.10, 1.8.15); Robin Cormack, *Writing in Gold: Byzantine Society and Its Icons* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 65–66.
- [27.](#) *Vita Theodore Sycotae* 39.
- [28.](#) *Miracula sancti Artemii* 34, trans. Virgil S. Crisafulli, *The Miracles of St. Artemios: A Collection of Miracle Stories by an Anonymous Author of Seventh-Century Byzantium*, ed. Crisafulli and John W. Nesbit (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 16–17.
- [29.](#) *Acts Pet.* 20–21.
- [30.](#) *Acts John* 87–89. The dating and compilation of this document are discussed in chap. 5, n. 2. See also the Syriac *Acts Thom.*, 153, which recounts the deeds of Jesus’s twin and has the apostle Thomas address Christ as “polymorphous Jesus.” See Robin M. Jensen, “The Polymorphous Christ in Early Christian Image and Text,” in *Seeing the God: Image, Space, Performance, and Vision in the Religion of the Roman Empire*, ed. M. Arnhold, H. Maier, and J. Rüpke (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 149–75, esp. 157–59.
- [31.](#) *Ap. John* 2.4–8.
- [32.](#) *Acts of Andrew and Matthias* 18, trans. J. K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 291. This was once included in the apocryphal *Acts of Andrew* but is now considered a separate document.
- [33.](#) Piacenza Pilgrim, *Itin.* 23. The pilgrim’s encounter with a statue of Christ in Pilate’s praetorium is mentioned in “Christian Portraits Likened to

Pagan Idols” in chap. 5. He describes that Christ as handsome, with curly hair, a well-shaped foot, and long fingers (*Itin.* 23).

[34.](#) Justin Martyr, *Dial.* 14, 49.

[35.](#) Clement, *Paed.* 3.1.

[36.](#) Origen, *Cels.* 2.63–67.

[37.](#) Origen, *Cels.* 6.75–77.

[38.](#) Origen, *Cels.* 6.75 (SC 147: 366–69), trans. Henry Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 388–89.

[39.](#) Origen, *Cels.* 6.75, trans. Chadwick, *Origen*, 389.

[40.](#) Tertullian, *Carn. Chr.* 9; see also *Idol.* 18.

[41.](#) John Chrysostom, *Exp. Ps.* 44.3 (PG 55: 185–86).

[42.](#) See Robin M. Jensen, “Early Christian Visual Theology: Iconography of the Trinity and Christ,” in *Image as Theology*, ed. C. Strine, A. Torrance, and M. McInroy (Turnhout: Brepols, forthcoming); Jensen, *Face to Face: The Portrait of the Divine in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 154–65; Natalie Kampen, “What Is a Man?,” in *What Is a Man? Changing Images of Masculinity in Late Antique Art*, ed. Kampen, E. Marlowe, and R. Holholt (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002), 11–13.

[43.](#) Dating these mosaics is complicated, as the mausoleum may have been completed only after the body of Helena, Constantina’s sister, joined hers, sometime after 360.

[44.](#) See Achim Arbeiter, “Die Mosaiken,” in *Das Mausoleum der Constantina in Rom, Spätantiken Rundbauten in Rom und Latium 4*, ed. J.J. Rasch and Arbeiter (Mainz: P. von Zabern, 2007), 103–53, renovations discussed at 104.

[45.](#) See Arbeiter, “Mosaiken,” 112, 114, pl. 94, discussed by Couzin, *The “Traditio Legis”: Anatomy of an Image* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2015), 10.

[46.](#) Discussion in Galit Noga-Banai, *Sacred Stimulus: Jerusalem in the Visual Christianization of Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 32–34. Here Noga-Banai also associates these booths with the Jewish festival of Sukkot.

[47.](#) See Arbeiter, “Mosaiken,” 112–15.

[48.](#) Ross Holloway identifies the figures as “Jehovah giving the Law to Moses,” in *Constantine and Rome* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 103, following Mikael B. Rasmussen, “*Traditio legis?*,” *Cahiers archéologiques* 47 (1999): 27–28. See also Galit Noga-Banai, “Visual Prototype versus Biblical Text: Moses Receiving the Law in Rome,” in *Sarcofagi tardoantichi, paleocristiani e altomedievali*, ed. F. Bisconti and H.

Brandenburg (Vatican City: Pontificio istituto di archeologia cristiana, 2004), 173–83, esp. 177–78.

- [49.](#) On this motif and questions of standard nomenclature, see Couzin, “*Traditio Legis*”; Armin Bergmeier, “The *Traditio Legis* in Late Antiquity and Its Afterlives in the Middle Ages,” *Gesta* 56 (2017): 27–53; Ivan Foletti and Irene Quandri, “Roma, l’Oriente e il mito della *Traditio Legis*,” *Opuscula historiae artium* 62, suppl. (2013): 16–37; Geir Hellemo, “Theme Group II: Christ as Lawgiver among the Apostle Princes,” in *Adventus Domini: Eschatological Thought in 4th-Century Apses and Catecheses*, VCS 5 (Leiden: Brill, 1989), 65–89; Bas Snelders, “The *Traditio Legis* on Early Christian Sarcophagi,” *Antiquité tardive* 13 (2005): 321–33.
- [50.](#) See Paul Zanker, *The Mask of Socrates: The Image of the Intellectual in Antiquity*, trans. A. Shapiro (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 300–302. On the philosopher type see Arthur Urbano, “Sizing Up the Philosopher’s Cloak: Christian Verbal and Visual Representations of the *Tribōn*,” in *Dressing Judeans and Christians in Antiquity*, ed. Kristi Upson-Saia, Carly Daniel-Hughes, and Alicia J. Batten (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2014), 175–94. See also Robin M. Jensen, “Visual Representations of Early Christian Teachers and of Christ as the True Philosopher,” in *Christian Teachers in Second-Century Rome: Schools and Students in the Ancient City*, edited by H. Gregory Snyder (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 60–83.
- [51.](#) Dio Chrysostom, *Orat.* 72.5 (*On Personal Appearance*).
- [52.](#) Beardless figures of Christ giving the Law to Peter and Paul occur on several sarcophagi in the Vatican’s Museo Pio Cristiano, the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus in the treasury of Saint Peter’s Basilica (a plaster cast of which is also in the Museo Pio Cristiano), and the so-called sarcophagus of Stilicho in Milan’s Basilica of Sant’Ambrogio.
- [53.](#) See Zanker, *Mask of Socrates*, 299, who argues that rather than Apollo, Jesus looks like idealized figures of Roman young men or Greek heroes such as Achilles and Alexander. See also David Aune, “Heracles and Christ: Heracles Imagery in the Christology of Early Christianity,” in *Greeks, Romans, and Christians*, ed. D. Balch, E. Ferguson, and W. Meeks (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 3–19; Susan Walker, *Greek and Roman Portraits* (London: British Museum Press, 1995), 83–93.
- [54.](#) This similarity is noted as “long recognized” by Grabar, *Christian Iconography*, 34–35, who concludes that while “no Christian could have thought of Christ with the head of a pagan god” (34), this representation was part of the repertory of the period, meant to designate omnipotence.

- See also Mathews, *Clash of Gods*, 101–14; Ivan Foletti, “God from God,” in *The Fifth Century in Rome: Art Liturgy, Patronage*, ed. Foletti and M. Gianandrea (Rome: Viella, 2017), 11–29. Foletti’s essay links Christ’s depiction to that of Jupiter Serapis following the destruction of the Serapeum, when, he argues, Christ was briefly identified as a new Serapis.
- [55.](#) As Mathews phrases it, in *Clash of Gods*, “Christ stole the look of the gods with whom he was in competition” (60–61).
 - [56.](#) Theodorus Lector, *Hist. eccl.* 1.15. This story is also included in John of Damascus, *Div. imag.* 3.130, and is cited by Dagron, “Holy Images and Likenesses,” 29–30; Mathews, *Clash of Gods*, 186.
 - [57.](#) See Mathews, *Clash of Gods*, 141, where he describes Christ as like a chameleon.
 - [58.](#) Per Jonas Nordhagen, “The Penetration of Byzantine Mosaic Technique into Italy in the Sixth Century,” in *III Colloquio internazionale sul mosaico antico: Ravenna, 6–10 settembre 1980*, ed. R.F. Campanati (Ravenna: Girasole, 1983), 75–79.
 - [59.](#) See Jean-Michel Spieser, “Invention du portrait du Christ,” in *Le portrait: La représentation de l’individu*, Micrologus’ Library 17, ed. Agostino Paravicini Bagliani, Spieser, and Jean Wirth (Florence: SISMEL-Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2007), 57–76.
 - [60.](#) See, e.g., Reiner Sörries, *Die Bilder der Orthodoxen im Kampf gegen den Arianismus* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1983), 83–84; Clementina Rizzardi, “L’arte dei Goti a Ravenna: Motivi ideologici, aspetti iconografici e formali nella decorazione musiva,” in *Corsi di cultura sull’arte ravennate e bizantina* 36 (1989): 365–88. This argument is briefly reviewed in Deborah Mauskopf Deliyannis, *Ravenna in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 156–57.
 - [61.](#) Neil MacGregor, *Seeing Salvation: Images of Christ in Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 80–81. Here MacGregor appears to confuse Arianism with Nestorianism.
 - [62.](#) See Jensen, *Face to Face*, 159–64, noted by Deliyannis, *Ravenna in Late Antiquity*, 156; also Jensen, “Early Christian Visual Theology.”
 - [63.](#) One might think of Michelangelo’s Christ in the Sistine Chapel’s *Last Judgment* for a relatively modern example. A lengthy discussion of Christ’s varying beards and hairstyles can be found in Michele Bacci, *The Many Faces of Christ* (London: Reaktion Books, 2014), 116–40.
 - [64.](#) Nicephorus, *Antirrh.* 3.3 (PG 99: 957).

[65.](#) See the discussion of John of Damascus in “Emphasizing Incarnation” in chap. 8.

CHAPTER 7. MIRACULOUS AND MEDIATING PORTRAITS

- [1.](#) On the reciprocal gaze see David Morgan, *The Embodied Eye: Religious Visual Culture and the Social Life of Feeling* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 59.
- [2.](#) For a broad discussion of the aesthetic aspects of saints' relics, see Patricia Cox Miller, "'The Little Blue Flower Is Red': Relics and the Poetizing of the Body," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 8 (2000): 213–36.
- [3.](#) On the cloth, see Averil Cameron, "The Sceptic and the Shroud: Inaugural Lecture at King's College London, April 1980," in *Continuity and Change in Sixth-Century Byzantium* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1981), 3–27. On Veronica, see Ewa Kuryluk, *Veronica and Her Cloth: History, Symbolism and Structure of a "True" Image* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1991); Gerhard Wolf, "From Mandylion to Veronica: Picturing the 'Disembodied' Face and Disseminating the True Image of Christ in the Latin West," in *The Holy Face and the Paradox of Representation*, ed. H. Kessler and Wolf (Bologna: Nuova Alfa, 1998), 153–80.
- [4.](#) On the complicated history of this image see Averil Cameron, "The History of the Image of Edessa: The Telling of a Story," in *Okeanos: Essays Presented to I. Sevchenko*, Harvard Ukrainian Studies 7 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 80–94; Cameron, "The Mandylion and Byzantine Iconoclasm," in Kessler and Wolf, *Holy Face*, 33–54; Hans J.W. Drijvers, "The Image of Edessa in the Syriac Tradition," in *ibid.*, 13–31; Mark Guscini, *The Tradition of the Image of Edessa* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2016); Andrea Nicolotti and Alexi Lidov, "Holy Script, Holy Gate: Revealing the Edessa Paradigm in Christian Imagery," in *Intorno al Sacro volto*, ed. A. R. Calderoni Masetti, C. Dufour Bozzo, and G. Wolf (Venice: Marsilio, 2007), 145–62.
- [5.](#) Evagrius, *Hist.* 4.27. The image does not appear, however, in Procopius's account of the siege of Edessa, as Cameron notes in "Mandylion and Byzantine Iconoclasm," 38. For arguments that the report in Evagrius was an interpolation of iconodules, see Cameron, "Mandylion and Byzantine Iconoclasm," 47–48.
- [6.](#) *Doctrina Addai*, trans. George Howard, *The Teaching of Addai: Texts and Translations* (Chico, CA: Scholars, 1981), 7–11. Earlier, Eusebius referred to a letter from Christ to Abgar but did not mention a miraculous image (*Hist. eccl.* 1.13.5–22).

- [7.](#) *Acta Thaddaei*. See Andrea Nicolotti, *From the Mandylion of Edessa to the Shroud of Turin: The Metamorphosis and Manipulation of a Legend* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 32–33.
- [8.](#) *Acta Mar Mari* 3, trans. Nicolotti, *Mandylion of Edessa*, 12.
- [9.](#) For more on these miraculous images, see Kessler and Wolf, *Holy Face*.
- [10.](#) John of Damascus refers to such miraculous images in *Exp. fid.* 89; they are also noted in the florilegium appended to his *Orat.* 1.33.
- [11.](#) Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 7.18.
- [12.](#) Gregory of Tours, *Glor. mar.* 20.
- [13.](#) Gregory of Tours, *Glor. mar.* 21.
- [14.](#) Gregory of Tours, *Glor. mar.* 22.
- [15.](#) Gregory of Nazianzus, *Poem. mor.* 1.2.10.802–7 (PG 37: 802–7), cited by Gabrielle Thomas, “The Human Icon: Gregory of Nazianzus on Being an *Imago Dei*,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 72 (2019): 173–74.
- [16.](#) Cyril of Scythopolis, *Life of Cyriacus*. See also Benedicta Ward, *Harlots of the Desert: A Study of Repentance in Early Monastic Sources* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian, 1987), 28–32.
- [17.](#) John of Ephesus, *Hist. eccl.* 3.29.
- [18.](#) *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 18. Other early instances of the relic cult might include the gathering of blood from the beheading of Cyprian (*Acts of Cyprian* 5) and the dipping of Pudens’s ring in Saturus’s blood (*Passion of Perpetua and Felicity* 21).
- [19.](#) See Éric Rebillard, *The Early Martyr Narratives: Neither Authentic Accounts nor Forgeries* (College Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2021), 39–43; Candida Moss, “On the Dating of Polycarp: Rethinking the Place of the Martyrdom of Polycarp in the History of Christianity,” *Early Christianity* 1 (2010): 539–74; Moss, “Polycarphilia: The Martyrdom of Polycarp and the Origins and Spread of Martyrdom,” in *The Rise and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries of the Common Era*, ed. C. K. Rothschild and J. Schröter (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 402–17.
- [20.](#) Optatus, *Contra Parmenian* 2.16–18. See also Robert Wiśniewski, *The Beginnings of the Cult of Relics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 17–21.
- [21.](#) For Wiśniewski’s argument for dating, see *Cult of Relics*, 17–18.
- [22.](#) Wiśniewski, *Cult of Relics*, 17n30, cites several historians who accept the Lucilla incident as historically accurate, including Peter Brown, *The Cult of Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: University of

- Chicago Press, 1981), 34; Patricia Cox Miller, "'Differential Networks': Relics and Other Fragments in Late Antiquity," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 6 (1998): 121-23.
- [23.](#) John Chrysostom, *De sancto hieromartyre Babyla*, text and trans. in Johan Leemans et al., *'Let Us Die That We May Live': Greek Homilies on Christian Martyrs from Asia Minor, Palestine and Syria (c. ad 350-ad 450)* (London: Routledge, 2003), 140-48; Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res gest.* 22.12.8; Rufinus, *Hist.* 10.35; Theodoret, *Hist. eccl.* 3.15.12; Sozomen, *Hist.* 5.19.12; Socrates *Hist.* 3.18.1-4. See also Gillian Clark, *Christianity and Roman Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 56-57; Samuel N.C. Lieu, *The Emperor Julian: Panegyric and Polemic* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1989), 48-52.
- [24.](#) Marianne Sághy, "Pope Damasus and the Beginnings of Roman Hagiography," in *Promoting the Saints: Cults and Their Contexts from Late Antiquity until the Early Modern Period*, ed. Ottó Gecser et al. (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2011), 1-16; Ambrose, *Ep.* 77.
- [25.](#) Gregory of Nyssa, *Sant. Theo.*
- [26.](#) Victricius of Rouen, *De laude sanct.* See David Hunter, "Vigilantius of Calagurris and Victricius of Rouen: Ascetics, Relics, and Clerics in Late Roman Gaul," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 7 (1999): 401-30.
- [27.](#) See more discussion of the material turn in chap. 8.
- [28.](#) On the allowance for martyrs' acta to be read out in the liturgy on feast days, see Council of Hippo (393), can. 5; *Breviarium Hipponense*, can. 36d (CCSL 149: 21, 43).
- [29.](#) See the fifth- or sixth-century *Martyrdom of Gallicanus, Iohannes, and Paulus*; the *Notitia ecclesiarum urbis Romae* (625/38) mentions the Caelian Hill basilica of Iohannes and Paulus, martyrs of Rome under Emperor Julian.
- [30.](#) See Giuseppe Wilpert, "Le pitture della 'confessio' sotto la basilica dei SS. Giovanni e Paolo," in *Scritti in onore di Bartolomeo Nogara raccolti in occasione del suo LXX anno* (Vatican City: Tipografia del Senato, 1937), 517-22. The difficulties of identifying the figures in the paintings are matched by the controversy over the site itself. A helpful summary appears in Lucy Grig, *Making Martyrs in Antiquity* (London: Duckworth, 2004), 120-27.
- [31.](#) See Umberto Fasola, *Le catacombe di S. Gennaro a Capodimonte* (Rome: Editalia, 1975), 73, 93; Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of*

- the Image before the Era of Art*, trans. E. Jephcott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 82.
- [32.](#) For more examples and discussion of early saints' portraits, see Robin M. Jensen, *Face to Face: The Portrait of the Divine in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 173–99.
- [33.](#) Egeria, *Itin.* 37.
- [34.](#) Jerome, *Ep.* 46.8.
- [35.](#) Jerome, *Ep.* 108.9, my translation. Critical edition: *Sancti Eusebii Hieronymi epistulae*, pt. 2, *Epistulae LXXI–CXX*, CSEL 55, ed. Isidore Hilberg (Vienna: Tempsky, 1912), 315.
- [36.](#) Jerome, *Vigil.* 4. On rituals of relic devotion, see Wiśniewski, *Cult of Relics*, 122–43. Pagans blew and waved kisses to cult statues, as noted by Minucius Felix, *Oct.* 2. See R. T. Meyer, “Note on Minucius Felix, Octavius 2.4,” *Classical Bulletin* 31 (1963): 22, which also mentions gestures like this in other classical literature, such as Pliny, *Nat. hist.* 28.5; Apuleius, *Met.* 4.28, *Apol.* 56; Lucian, *Sacrif.* 12, *Alex.* 30.
- [37.](#) Ps.–Anastasius Apocrisarius, *Disputatio inter Maximum et Theodosium* 4, trans. Pauline Allen and Bronwen Neil, *Maximus the Confessor and His Companions: Documents from Exile*, ed. Allen and Neil (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 100–101. John of Damascus cites this reconciliatory kissing of icons in *Orat.* 2.65.
- [38.](#) For some examples see Dimitra Kotoula, “Experiencing the Miracle: Animated Images and the Senses in the Burial Chapel of the Byzantine Saint, in *The Multi-sensory Image from Antiquity to the Renaissance*, ed. H. Hunter-Crawley and E. O’Brien (London: Routledge, 2019), 86–106.
- [39.](#) See Rebecca Browett, “Touching the Holy: The Rise of Contact Relics in Medieval England,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 68 (2017): 493–509. Instances of this practice are described in Gregory the Great, *Ep.* 4.30 (he offers *brandea* to Empress Constantina in place of bodily relics of Saint Paul), 14.12 (he offers the Lombard queen Theodolinda pewter ampullae [*eulogia*] containing oil that had been burning near Roman martyrs’ shrines).
- [40.](#) Augustine, *Civ.* 22.8 (among a long list of other miracles).
- [41.](#) See Anna Kartsonis, “The Responding Icon,” in *Heaven on Earth: Art and the Byzantine Church*, ed. Linda Safran (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), 58–80, esp. 60–64.
- [42.](#) An excellent study of portable relics is by Julia Smith, “Portable Christianity: Relics in the Medieval West (c. 700–1200),” *Proceedings of*

- the British Academy* 181 (2012): 143–67.
- [43.](#) Discussed by Gary Vikan, *Early Byzantine Pilgrimage Art* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Publications, 1982), 31–39; Vikan, “Art, Medicine, and Magic,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 38 (1984): 67–74.
- [44.](#) See Eric Thuno, *Image and Relic: Mediating the Sacred in Early Medieval Rome*, *Analecta romana instituti danici, supplementa* (Rome: “L’Erma” di Bretschneider, 2002); Jean-Claude Schmitt, “Les reliques et les images,” in *Les reliques: Objets, cultes, symbols—Actes du colloque international de l’Université du Littoral-Côte d’Opale (Boulogne-sur-Mer), 4–6 septembre 1997*, ed. E. Bozóky and A.-M. Helvetius (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999), 145–67.
- [45.](#) “Ritual-centered viewing” is a phrase borrowed from Jaś Elsner, *Roman Eyes: Visuality and Subjectivity in Art and Text* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 22–26; Elsner, “Between Mimesis and Divine Power: Visuality in the Greco-Roman World,” in *Visuality before and beyond the Renaissance: Seeing as Others Saw*, ed. Robert Nelson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 45–69.
- [46.](#) Robert Taft, “Is There Devotion to the Holy Eucharist in the Christian East?,” *Worship* 80 (2006): 218.
- [47.](#) *Ap. const.* 8.13.
- [48.](#) Some scholars argue that this work should instead be attributed to Cyril’s immediate successor as bishop, John of Jerusalem. See discussion in Maxwell Johnson, “Christian Initiation in Fourth-Century Jerusalem and Recent Developments in the Study of the Sources,” *Ecclesia Orans* 26 (2009): 143–61.
- [49.](#) Cyril of Jerusalem, *Myst. cat.* 5.19 (SC 126: 168–69), trans. F. L. Cross, *Saint Cyril of Jerusalem: Lectures on the Christian Sacraments*, PPS 2 (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1977). See also Paul Bradshaw and Maxwell Johnson, *The Eucharistic Liturgies: Their Evolution and Interpretation* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012), 65; Georgia Frank, “Taste and See: The Eucharist and the Eyes of Faith in the Fourth Century,” *Church History* 70, no. 4 (2001): 619–43.
- [50.](#) Cyril of Jerusalem, *Myst. cat.* 4.9.
- [51.](#) Cyril of Jerusalem, *Myst. cat.* 5.21–22.
- [52.](#) Taft, “Is There Devotion?,” 218–19, citing Theodore, *Cat. hom.* 16.28.
- [53.](#) On the imperial cult generally, see Ittai Gradel, *Emperor Worship and Roman Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2002); Thomas Pekáry, *Das römische Kaiserbildnis in Staat, Kult und Gesellschaft* (Berlin: Mann, 1985); S. R. F.

Price, *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), esp. 170–206. On Christian treatment of imperial images see André Grabar, *L'empereur dans l'art byzantin* (Paris: Les belles lettres, 1936); Kenneth Setton, *Christian Attitude towards the Emperor in the Fourth Century* (New York: AMS, 1967); more recently, Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 102–6; Maijastina Kahlos, “The Emperor’s New Images—How to Honour the Emperor in the Christian Roman Empire?,” in *Emperors and the Divine—Rome and Its Influence*, ed. Kahlos (Helsinki: Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies, 2014), 119–38.

- [54.](#) Siri Sande, “The Icon and Its Origin in Graeco-Roman Portraiture,” in *Aspects of Late Antiquity and Early Byzantium*, ed. L. Rydén (Uppsala: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1993), 81, discusses some examples, including an account that some men took garlands that adorned portraits of Caracalla in order to cure fever, noted in *Hist. Aug. M. Ant.* 5.7.
- [55.](#) Severian of Gabala, quoted in *De mund. creat. orat.* (often attributed to John Chrysostom) 6.5 (PG 56: 489I), trans. Paul Wheatley (by request); cited in Jaś Elsner, *Imperial Rome and Christian Triumph* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 54.
- [56.](#) Pliny the Younger, *Ep.* 10.96.5; *Acta Apollonii*.
- [57.](#) *Cod. Theod.* 9.44.1. On the legal status of the emperor’s image see Pekáry, *Das römische Kaiserbildnis*, 143–48.
- [58.](#) *Hist. Aug. M. Ant.* 5.7. Probably not contemporary with Caracalla, however.
- [59.](#) Basil of Caesarea, *In Is.* 13.267 (PG 30: 589A–B), cited by John of Damascus, *Orat.* 3.56. Likewise, after the so-called riot of the statues in Antioch, when some citizens evidently destroyed imperial images in anger over the imposition of a new tax, John Chrysostom, who was then residing there as presbyter, sought to appease the emperor Theodosius. See John Chrysostom, *Stat.* 2.1–3; Libanius, *Or.* 19.60–61.
- [60.](#) Ambrose, *Exp. Ps. 118* 10.25, my translation. Critical edition: *Sancti Ambrosii opera*, pt. 5, *Expositio Psalmi CXVIII*, CSEL 62, ed. Michael Petschenig (Vienna: Tempsky, 1913), 291.
- [61.](#) Gregory of Nazianzus, *C. Jul.* 1.80–81.
- [62.](#) Jerome, *Expl. Dan.* 3.18 (PL 25: 507), trans. Gleason Archer, *Jerome’s Commentary on Daniel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1958), 38.
- [63.](#) See Robin M. Jensen, “The Three Hebrew Youths and the Problem of the Emperor’s Portrait in Early Christianity,” in *Jewish Art in Its Late Antique*

- Context*, ed. Uzi Leibner and Catherine Hezser (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 303-20.
- [64.](#) Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 103.
- [65.](#) *Questions from a Pagan to a Christian* 1.28. Discussed in Setton, *Christian Attitude*, 207-11; Kahlos, "Emperor's New Images," 119-21.
- [66.](#) *Cod. Theod.* 15.4.1 (425), trans. C. Pharr, *The Theodosian Code* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), 432.
- [67.](#) Athanasius, *C. Ar.* 3.23.5 (PG 26: 329-32), trans. J. H. Newman, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2nd ser., ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wallace, vol. 4, *Athanasius: Select Works and Letters* (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2007), 396, slightly edited. This and other texts like it are found in the *Treatise* of John of Damascus as part of his defense of icons: see *Orat.* 3.114. The acta of the Seventh Ecumenical Council (Nicaea II) in 787 also refer to the emperor's image in affirming the orthodoxy of holy icons: "For if the people go forth with lights and incense to meet the 'laurata' and images of the Emperors when they are sent to cities or rural districts, they honour surely not the tablet covered over with wax, but the Emperor himself. How much more is it necessary that in the churches of Christ our God, the image of God our Saviour and of his spotless Mother and of all the holy and blessed fathers and ascetics should be painted?" Trans. Henry Percival in Schaff and Wallace, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 14, *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, 535. Critical edition: Philippe Labbé and Gabriel Cossart, eds., *Sacrosancta concilia ad regiam editionem exacta*, vol. 7 (Paris: Societas typographica librorum ecclesiasticorum, 1671), col. 53.
- [68.](#) Basil of Caesarea, *Hom.* 24.4 (*Contra Sabellianos et Arian et Anomoeos*; PG 31: 608AB).
- [69.](#) Basil of Caesarea, *Spir. Sanct.* 18.45, trans. David Anderson, *St. Basil the Great: On the Holy Spirit*, PPS 5 (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2011), 72 (emphasis in the original). Critical edition: *Basile de Césarée: Sur le Saint-Esprit*, SC 17, ed. Benoît Pruche (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1947). Also cited by John of Damascus, *Orat.* 1.35, *Orat.* 3.
- [70.](#) Julian, *Frag. ep.* (*Fragment of a Letter to a Priest*) 294C-D, trans. Wilmer Cave Wright, *The Works of the Emperor Julian*, vol. 2, LCL (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1913), 311.

CHAPTER 8. MATERIALITY, VISUALITY, AND SPIRITUAL INSIGHT

- [1.](#) The literature is extensive, but prominent examples include Patricia Cox Miller, *The Corporeal Imagination* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009); Clifford Ando, *The Matter of the Gods: Religion and the Roman Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); Caroline Walker Bynum, *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe* (New York: Zone, 2011).
- [2.](#) Again, there are too many works to mention, but these are recommended: David Morgan, *Visual Piety: A History and Theory of Popular Religious Images* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Vernon Robbins, Walter Melion, and Roy Jeal, eds., *The Art of Visual Exegesis: Rhetoric, Texts, Images* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2017); Jaś Elsner, *Art and the Roman Viewer: The Transformation of Art from the Pagan World to Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
- [3.](#) Miller, *Corporeal Imagination*, 3.
- [4.](#) Athenagoras, *Leg.* 15, translation in “Other Christian Apologists’ Attacks on Cult Images” in chap. 1.
- [5.](#) Jerome, *Vigil.* 4, 7.
- [6.](#) Theodor Klauser, “Erwägungen zur Entstehung der altchristlichen Kunst,” *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 76 (1965): 1–11; Klauser, “Die Äusserungen der alten Kirche zur Kunst: Revision der Zeugnisse, Folgerungen für die archäologische Forschung,” in *Atti del VI Congresso internazionale di archeologia cristiana* (Vatican City: Pontificio istituto di archeologia cristiana, 1965), 223–42.
- [7.](#) Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987), 676–77.
- [8.](#) Jerome, *Vigil.* 7.
- [9.](#) Ramsay MacMullen, *The Second Church: Popular Christianity, a.d. 200–400* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 30–31. See also MacMullen, *Christianity and Paganism in the Fourth to Eighth Centuries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 119, 121.
- [10.](#) Margaret R. Miles, *Image as Insight: Visual Understanding in Western Christianity and Secular Culture* (Boston: Beacon, 1985), 36, 38.
- [11.](#) Gregory the Great, *Ep.* 9.209, *Ep.* 11.10. See “Fifth- and Sixth-Century Acceptance and Application” in chap. 5.

- [12.](#) Bede, *Hom.* 1.13 (CCSL 122: 93), *De templo* (CCSL 119A: 212–13); Bonaventure, *Comm. Sent.*, lib. III. sent. 9., art. 1. q. 1; Thomas Aquinas, *Comm. in IV Sent.*, lib. III, dist. IX, art. 2, sol. 2 ad sum; John Calvin, *Inst.* 1.11.5. See discussion in Lawrence Duggan, “Was Art Really the ‘Book of the Illiterate’?,” *Word and Image* 5, no. 3 (1989): 227–51.
- [13.](#) Peter Brown, “Images as a Substitute for Writing,” in *East and West: Modes of Communication*, ed. Evangelos Chrysos and Ian Wood (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 18.
- [14.](#) Brown, “Images as a Substitute,” 16, citing Ramsay MacMullen, *Changes in the Roman Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 71–106; Hugo Brandenburg, “*Ars Humilis*: Zur Frage eines christlichen Stils in der Kunst des 4. Jahrhunderts nach Christus,” *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 24 (1981): 71–84.
- [15.](#) Brown, “Images as a Substitute,” 16–17.
- [16.](#) Miller, *Corporeal Imagination*, 11.
- [17.](#) Peter W. L. Walker, *Holy City, Holy Places? Christian Attitudes to Jerusalem and the Holy Places in the Fourth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), 81, quoted in Miller, *Corporeal Imagination*, 11.
- [18.](#) Georgia Frank, “The Pilgrim’s Gaze in the Age before Icons,” in *Visuality before and beyond the Renaissance*, ed. R. Nelson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 103, quoted in Miller, *Corporeal Imagination*, 11.
- [19.](#) John of Damascus, *Orat.* 1.16, trans. Andrew Louth, *St. John of Damascus: Three Treatises on the Divine Images* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2003), 29. Critical edition: *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, ed. Bonifatius Kotter, Band 3, *Contra imaginum calumniatores orationes tres*, PTS 17 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1975).
- [20.](#) Jerome, *Vigil*. See David Hunter, “Vigilantius of Calagurris and Victricius of Rouen: Ascetics, Relics, and Clerics in Late Roman Gaul,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 7 (1999): 401–30.
- [21.](#) Victricius of Rouen, *De laude sanct.* 8.21–22. See Gillian Clark, “Victricius of Rouen: Praising the Saints,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 7 (1999): 364–99.
- [22.](#) The dating is controversial; probably sometime between 320 and 335.
- [23.](#) Athanasius, *Inc.* 6.
- [24.](#) Athanasius, *Inc.* 16.
- [25.](#) Joan Taylor, *Christians and the Holy Places: The Myth of Jewish-Christian Origins* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 308, 314.

- [26.](#) Susan Ashbrook Harvey, *Scenting Salvation: Ancient Christianity and the Olfactory Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 57–58.
- [27.](#) Harvey, *Scenting Salvation*, 58.
- [28.](#) Robert A. Markus, “How on Earth Could Places Become Holy? Origins of the Christian Idea of Holy Places,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 2 (1994): 261, 262.
- [29.](#) Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony, *Encountering the Sacred: The Debate on Christian Pilgrimage in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 23.
- [30.](#) Eusebius, *Vit. Const.* 3.25–40.
- [31.](#) See Paul Bradshaw and Maxwell Johnson, *The Eucharistic Liturgies: Their Evolution and Interpretation* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012), 61.
- [32.](#) Alexander Schmemmann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology*, trans. Asheleigh E. Moorhouse (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1986), 120–21.
- [33.](#) Bradshaw and Johnson, *Eucharistic Liturgies*, 75.
- [34.](#) Augustine, *Serm.* 277.10. This theory is often referred to as extromission and is partly based on Plato’s idea of the viewer as the active agent.
- [35.](#) Augustine, *Trin.* 11.2–3.
- [36.](#) Augustine, *Gen. ad litt.* 12.6.15–16.
- [37.](#) Augustine, *Gen. ad litt.* 12.11.22 (CSEL 25: 392–93), trans. John H. Taylor, *St. Augustine: The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, vol. 2, ACW 42 (New York: Newman, 1982), 191–92.
- [38.](#) See also Augustine, *Conf.* 10.8.13, 10.17–11.18.
- [39.](#) Augustine, *Ad Simp.* 1.Q.2.14.
- [40.](#) Augustine, *Conf.* 7.24.
- [41.](#) Augustine, *Civ.* 22.29.
- [42.](#) For a clarifying study on this hierarchy of realities see Pierre Hadot, *Plotinus, or The Simplicity of Vision*, trans. Michael Chase (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), esp. 26–34.
- [43.](#) Plotinus, *Enn.* 5.8, “On the Intelligible Beauty.”
- [44.](#) Plotinus, *Enn.* 5.8.1, trans. George Boys-Stones et al., *Plotinus: The Enneads*, ed. Lloyd P. Gerson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 610.
- [45.](#) For a dated but still helpful discussion see John P. Anton, “Plotinus’ Conception of the Functions of the Artist,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 26, no. 1 (1967): 91–101.

- [46.](#) Plotinus, *Enn.* 4.3.11.
- [47.](#) Plotinus, *Enn.* 4.3.11.
- [48.](#) Iamblichus, *Myst.* 5.15–16.
- [49.](#) Iamblichus, *Myst.* 5.9. On this principle of gradual transcendence and like gravitating to like, see Gregory Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul: The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus* (Kettering, OH: Angelico, 2014), 121–33; Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony, *The Ladder of Prayer and the Ship of Stirrings: The Praying Self in Late Antique East Syrian Christianity* (Leuven: Peeters, 2019), 33–41.
- [50.](#) Iamblichus, *Myst.* 7.4.
- [51.](#) Iamblichus, *Myst.* 3.29, trans. Emma C. Clark, John M. Dillon, and Jackson P. Hershbell, *Iamblichus: On the Mysteries* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 191.
- [52.](#) Iamblichus, *Myst.* 3.38.
- [53.](#) Iamblichus, *Myst.* 8.7.
- [54.](#) Sallustius, *De deis* 15.2, trans. Gilbert Murray, *Four Stages of Greek Religion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1912), 207–8. See also Murray, *Five Stages of Greek Religion* (Boston: Beacon, 1925), 200–225.
- [55.](#) Porphyry, *Peri agamalon*, preserved in Eusebius, *Praep. ev.* 3.7.1. Noted in “Claiming Common Ground: Philosophers, Apologists, Poets, and Artists,” chap. 1.
- [56.](#) Basil of Caesarea, *Ep.* 38.3.
- [57.](#) Pseudo-Dionysius, *Myst. theo.* 1.1000C–1001.
- [58.](#) Pseudo-Dionysius, *Div. nom.* 8.3.869C–872B, trans. Andrew Louth, *Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 168. Critical edition: *Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita: Corpus Dionysiacum*, Band 1, *De divinis nominibus*, PTS 33, ed. Beate Regina Suchla (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1990).
- [59.](#) Pseudo-Dionysius, *Eccl. hier.* 441C. On the similarities between Iamblichus’s and Dionysius’s ideas of theurgy, see Wiebke-Marie Stock, “Theurgy and Aesthetics in Dionysios the Areopagite,” in *Aesthetics and Theurgy in Byzantium*, ed. S. Mariev and Stock (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), 13–30; Andrew Louth, “Pagan Theurgy and Christian Sacramentalism in Denys the Areopagite,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 37, no. 2 (1986): 432–38. Here Louth calls attention to Paul Rorem, *Biblical and Liturgical Symbols within the Pseudo-Dionysian Synthesis* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984), esp. 99–16.

- [60.](#) Stock, "Theurgy and Aesthetics," 30. See also the useful analysis by Filip Ivanović, "Pseudo-Dionysius and the Importance of Sensible Things," in *Pseudo-Dionysius and Christian Visual Culture, c. 500-900*, ed. Francesca Dell'Acqua and Ernesto Sergio Mainoldi (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 77-88.

EPILOGUE

- [1.](#) The extensive bibliography on the subject of Christian destruction of pagan statues includes Ine Jacobs, "Production to Destruction? Pagan and Mythological Statuary in Asia Minor," *American Journal of Archaeology* 114 (2010): 267-303; Peter Stewart, "Destruction of Statues in Late Antiquity," in *Constructing Identities in Late Antiquity*, ed. R. Miles (London: Routledge, 1999), 159-89; Michael Gaddis, *There Is No Crime for Those Who Have Christ: Religious Violence in the Christian Roman Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Helen Saradi-Mendelovici, "Christian Attitudes toward Pagan Monuments in Late Antiquity and Their Legacy in Later Byzantine Centuries," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 44 (1990): 47-61; Troels M. Kristensen, *Making and Breaking the Gods: Christian Responses to Pagan Statuary in Late Antiquity* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2013).
- [2.](#) *Mart. Apoll.* 7. Apollonius is also mentioned by Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.21; Jerome, *Vir. ill.* 40-42.
- [3.](#) *Pass. Sant. Mart. Fruct.* 2. This story is also found in Prudentius, *Peri.* 6; Augustine, *Serm.* 273.
- [4.](#) *Mart. Pion.* 4.
- [5.](#) Council of Elvira, can. 60: "Si quis idola fregerit et ibidem fuerit occisus, quaternus in evangelio scriptum non est neque invenietur sub apostolis unquam factum, placuit in numerum eum no recipe martyrum." On the question of this canon's authenticity, see José Orlandis and Domingo Ramos-Lissón, *Die Synoden auf der Iberischen Halbinsel bis zum Einbruch des Islam (711)* (Paderborn: F. Schöningh, 1981). For discussion of the authenticity of the Elvira canons, see chap. 5, n. 20.
- [6.](#) Augustine, *Ep.* 16-17.
- [7.](#) Augustine, *Ep.* 185.12 (CSEL 57: 11), trans. Roland J. Teske, *Saint Augustine: Letters 156-210*, *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, pt. 2, vol. 3, edited by Boniface Ramsay (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2004), 186. On these episodes and the connections they may have with the Donatist controversy in Africa, see Brent Shaw, *Sacred Violence: African Christians and Sectarian Hatred in the Age of Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
- [8.](#) Eusebius, *Vit. Const.* 2.44, 3.54-58. Historians have suggested that these actions might have been undertaken by one of Constantine's sons,

however. See Scott Bradbury, "Constantine and the Problem of Anti-pagan Legislation in the Fourth Century," *Classical Philology* 82 (1994): 120-39.

- [9.](#) Eusebius, *Vit. Const.* 3.54. See also Liz James, "'Pray Not to Fall into Temptation and Be on Your Guard': Pagan Statues in Christian Constantinople," *Gesta* 35 (1996): 12-20.
- [10.](#) *Cod. Theod.* 16.10.2-3.
- [11.](#) Firmicus Maternus, *Err. prof. rel.* 20.7.
- [12.](#) *Cod. Theod.* 16.10.12-13.
- [13.](#) *Cod. Theod.* 16.10.8.
- [14.](#) *Cod. Theod.* 16.10.15-16, 16.10.18.
- [15.](#) *Cod. Theod.* 16.10.19.
- [16.](#) Libanius, *Or.* 30.11-13, 30.22.
- [17.](#) Libanius, *Or.* 30.33, 30.42-43, *Or.* 11.125.
- [18.](#) Socrates, *Hist. eccl.* 3.15 (on Macedonius, Theodulus, and Tatian, their city identified as Merum); Sozomen, *Hist. eccl.* 5.9, 5.11 (on Eusebius, Nestabus, and Zeno of Gaza and Macedonius, Theodolus, and Tatian from the Phrygian city of Misos); Theodoret, *Hist. eccl.* 3.3. Stories of early Christian martyrs being executed for attacking idols are rare in the historical record, however.
- [19.](#) Sozomen, *Hist. eccl.* 5.7.
- [20.](#) Theodoret, *Hist. eccl.* 5.21.
- [21.](#) The destruction of the Serapeum is recounted by a number of ancient sources, including Sozomen, *Hist. eccl.* 7.15; Socrates, *Hist. eccl.* 5.16; Theodoret, *Hist. eccl.* 5.22; Rufinus, *Hist. eccl.* 11.22-23; a famous papyrus from a fifth-century world chronicle written in Alexandria, with an illustration of Theophilus triumphantly standing atop the Serapeum. On the links among these documents see A. Baldini, "Problemi della tradizione sulla 'distruzione' del Serapeo di Alessandria," *Rivista storica dell'antichità* 15 (1985): 97-152; Philip Amidon, *The Church History of Rufinus of Aquileia, Books 10 and 11* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 80-83. The secondary scholarship is extensive and includes David Frankfurter, "Iconoclasms and Christianization in Late Antique Egypt," in *From Temple to Church: Destruction and Renewal of Local Cultic Topography in Late Antiquity*, ed. J. Hahn, S. Emmel, and U. Gotter (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 135-59; Johannes Hahn, "The Conversion of the Cult Statues: The Destruction of the Serapeum 392 a.d. and the Transformation of Alexandria into the 'Christ-Loving' City," in *ibid.*, 335-63; Troels M. Kristensen, "Embodied Images: Christian Response and Destruction in Late Antique Egypt,"

- Journal of Late Antiquity* 2, no. 2 (2009): 224-50; Kristensen, "Religious Conflict in Late Antique Alexandria: Christian Responses to 'Pagan' Statues in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries," in *Alexandria—A Cultural and Religious Melting Pot*, ed. G. Hinge and J. Krasilnikoff (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2010), 158-75.
- [22.](#) Socrates, *Hist. eccl.* 5.16.
 - [23.](#) Theodoret, *Hist. eccl.* 5.22. Olympus is also mentioned in Sozomen, *Hist. eccl.* 7.15; Socrates, *Hist. eccl.* 5.16.
 - [24.](#) Sozomen, *Hist. eccl.* 7.15.
 - [25.](#) Socrates, *Hist. eccl.* 6.16.
 - [26.](#) Sulpicius Severus, *Vit. Mart.* 15.
 - [27.](#) Sulpicius Severus, *Dial.* 3.9.
 - [28.](#) Augustine, *Serm.* 24.6
 - [29.](#) Augustine, *Serm.* 24.6 (CCSL 41: 331-32), trans. Edmund Hill, *Sermons, The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, pt. 3, vol. 2, edited by John E. Rotelle (Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1990), 77.
 - [30.](#) Augustine, *Ep.* 50. The law in question was probably the one given to the African proconsul Apollodorus in 399; see *Cod. Theod.* 16.10.18.
 - [31.](#) See, e.g., Michele R. Salzman, "Rethinking Pagan-Christian Violence," In *Violence in Late Antiquity: Perceptions and Practices*, ed. H.A. Drake (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 265-85; David Riggs, "The Continuity of Paganism between the Cities and the Countryside of Late Roman Africa," in *Urban Centers and Rural Contexts in Late Antiquity*, ed. T. S. Burns and J. W. Edie (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2012), 285-300; Éric Rebillard, "The Christian Mob and the Destruction of Pagan Statues: The Case of North Africa in the Age of Augustine," in *Transformations of Religious Practices in Late Antiquity* (Aldershot: Variorum, 2013), 73-87.
 - [32.](#) See Lea Stirling, *The Learned Collector: Mythological Statuettes and Classical Taste in Late Antique Gaul* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005); Troels M. Kristensen and Stirling, eds., *The Afterlife of Greek and Roman Sculpture: Late Antique Responses and Practices* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016).
 - [33.](#) See Béatrice Caseau, "Religious Intolerance and Pagan Statuary," in *The Archaeology of Late Antique 'Paganism,'* ed. L. Lavan and M. Mulryan (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 479-502, esp. 479-89; Claude Lepelley, "Le musée de statues divines: La volonté de sauvegarder le patrimoine artistique païen à l'époque théodosienne," *Cahiers archéologiques* 42 (1994): 5-15.

- [34.](#) Palladas, *Anth. pal.* 9.538, mentioned by Alan Cameron, "Palladas and Christian Polemic," *Journal of Roman Studies* 55 (1965): 17-30.
- [35.](#) Prudentius, *C. Symm.* 1.502-505.
- [36.](#) Constantine Marinescu, "Transformation of Classical Objects and Their Re-use during Antiquity," in *Shifting Frontiers in Late Antiquity*, ed. R. Mathisen and H. Sivan (Aldershot: Variorum, 1996), 285-98; Kristensen, *Making and Breaking the Gods*, 126-27; Kristensen, "Miraculous Bodies: Christian Viewers and the Transformation of 'Pagan' Sculpture in Late Antiquity," in *Patrons and Viewers in Late Antiquity*, ed. S. Birk and E. Poulsen (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2012), 31-66.
- [37.](#) Regarding concern about demonic possession of statues, see chap. 1.
- [38.](#) Athanasius, *Vit. Ant.* 13, 35. See also Athanasius, *Inc.* 29, 47, 53, which mentions the defeat of demons with the cross sign.
- [39.](#) Lactantius, *Inst.* 4.27.
- [40.](#) Cyril of Jerusalem, *Cat.* 4.14.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Translations are listed in Secondary Sources.

PRIMARY SOURCES

- Ambrose. *Sancti Ambrosii opera*. Pt. 5, *Expositio Psalmi CXVIII*. CSEL 62. Edited by Michael Petschenig. Vienna: Tempsky, 1913.
- Apuleius. *Pro se de magia liber (Apologia)*. Vol. 2, fasc. 1 of *Apulei Platonici Madaurensis opera quae supersunt*, BSGRT, edited by Rudolf Helm. Leipzig: Teubner, 1963.
- Arnobius. *Adversus nationes*. In *Patrologiae cursus completus, series latina*, edited by J.-P. Migne, vol. 5, 349-1372. Paris: Sirou, 1844.
- Athanasius. *Athanase d'Alexandrie: Sur l'incarnation du Verbe*. SC 199. Edited by Charles Kannengiesser. Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1973.
- . *Athanasius: De incarnatione Verbi*. Edited by E. P. Meijering. Amsterdam: J. C. Gieben, 1989.
- Athenagoras of Athens. *Athenagoras: "Legatio" and "De resurrectione."* OECT. Edited by William R. Schoedel. Oxford: Clarendon, 1972.
- . *Athenagoras: Legatio pro Christianis*. PTS 31. Edited by Miroslav Marcovich. Berlin: De Gruyter, 1994.

- Augustine. *Augustine: De Civitate Dei (The City of God), Books III and IV*. Aris and Phillips Classical Texts. Edited by P. G. Walsh. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007.
- . *Augustine: De Civitate Dei (The City of God), Books VI and VII*. Aris and Phillips Classical Texts. Edited by P. G. Walsh. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010.
- . *Augustine: De fide et symbolo*. Edited by E. P. Meijering. Amsterdam: J. C. Gieben, 1987.
- . *Augustinus: Ennarationes in Psalmos 101–150, pars 1*. CSEL 95/1. Edited by Franco Gori. Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2011.
- . *De civitate Dei*. CCSL 47–48. Edited by Bernard Dombert and Alphonse Kalb. Turnhout: Brepols, 1955.
- . *Sancti Augustini: Confessionum libri XIII*. CCSL 27. Edited by Lucas Verheijen. Turnhout: Brepols, 1981.
- . *Sancti Aurelii Augustini: De Trinitate, libri XV, libri I–XV*. CCSL 50. Edited by W. J. Mountain and F. Glorie. Turnhout: Brepols, 2001.
- . *S. Augustini epistulae (ep. 124–184A)*. CSEL 44. Edited by A. Goldbacher. Vienna: Tempsky, 1904.
- . *Vingt-six sermons au peuple d’Afrique*. CEAug, Série antiquité 147. Edited by François Dolbeau. Paris: Institut d’études augustiniennes, 1996.
- Basil of Caesarea. *Basile de Césarée: Sur le Saint-Esprit*. SC 17. Edited by Benoît Pruche. Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1947.
- Cassian, John. *Jean Cassien: Conférences II*. SC 54. Edited by E. Pichery. Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1958.
- Cicero. *Cicero: De natura deorum, liber I*. CGLC. Edited by Andrew R. Dyck. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Clement of Alexandria. *Clemens Alexandrinus*. Band 1, *Protrepticus und Paedagogus*. GCS 12. Edited by O. Stählin. 3rd ed., edited by U. Treu. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1972.
- . *Clément d’Alexandrie, Les stromates: Stromate I*. SC 30. Edited by Claude Mondésert and Marcel Caster. Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1951.
- . *Clément d’Alexandrie, Les stromates: Stromate V*. Tome 1. SC 278. Edited by A. le Boulluec. Translated by P. Voulet. Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1981.
- . *Clementis Alexandrini Paedagogus*. VCS 61. Edited by Miroslav Marcovich. Leiden: Brill, 2015.

- . *Clementis Alexandrini Protrepticus*. VCS 34. Edited by Miroslav Marcovich. Leiden: Brill, 1995.
- Cyril of Jerusalem. *Cyrille de Jérusalem: Catéchèses mystagogiques*. SC 126. Edited by Auguste Piédagnel. Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1966.
- Cyril of Scythopolis. *Kyrillos von Skythopolis*. Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur, Bd. 49, Hft. 2. Edited by E. Schwartz. Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1939.
- Diekamp, F., ed. *Analecta patristica: Texte und Abhandlungen zur griechischen Patristik*. Orientalia christiana analecta 117. Rome: Pontificio institutum orientalium studiorum, 1938.
- Diels, Hermann, and Walther Krantz, eds. *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker: Griechisch und Deutsch*. 3 vols. Berlin: Weidmann, 1960–61.
- Dio Chrysostom. *Dio Chrysostom: Orations VII, XII and XXXVI*. CGLC. Edited by D. A. Russell. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- Eusebius of Caesaria. *Eusèbe de Césarée: La préparation évangélique, livres II–III*. SC 228. Edited by Édouard des Places. Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1976.
- . *Eusebius: Die Praeparatio Evangelica*. Eusebius Werke 8.1–2. GCS. Edited by Karl Mras and Édouard des Places. Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1982–83.
- . *Eusebius Werke, Teil 1: Über das Leben des Kaisers Konstantin*. 2nd ed. GCS. Edited by Friedhelm Winkelmann. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1991.
- Gregory of Nazianzus. *Grégoire de Nazianze: Discours 38–41*. SC 358. Edited by Claudio Moreschini and Paul Gallay. Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1990.
- Gregory the Great. *Gregorius Magnus, Registrum epistularum: Libri VIII–XIV, Appendix*. CCSL 140A. Edited by D. Norberg. Turnhout: Brepols, 1982.
- Hippolytus. *Hippolytus: Refutation of All Heresies*. WGRW 40. Edited and translated by M. David Litwa. Atlanta: SBL, 2016.
- Jerome. *Sancti Eusebii Hieronymi epistulae*. Pt. 2, *Epistulae LXXI–CXX*. CSEL 55. Edited by Isidore Hilberg. Vienna: Tempsky, 1912.
- John of Damascus. *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*. Edited by Bonifatius Kotter. Band 3, *Contra imaginum calumniatores orationes tres*. PTS 17. Berlin: De Gruyter, 1975.
- Josephus. *Flavii Iosephi opera*. 7 vols. Edited by Benedict Niese. Berlin: Weidmann, 1955.
- Julian (the Apostate). *Giuliano imperatore: Contra Galilaeos*. Testi e commenti 9. Edited by Emanuela Masaracchia. Rome: Ateneo, 1991.
- . *Iuliani Augusti opera*. BSGRT. Edited by Heinz-Günther Nesselrath. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015.

- . *Julianii Imperatoris Librorum contra Christianos quae supersunt*. Edited by Karl J. Neumann. Leipzig: Teubner, 1880.
- Justin Martyr. *Iustini Martyris: Apologiae pro Christianis*. PTS 38. Edited by Miroslav Marcovich. Berlin: De Gruyter, 1994.
- Labbé, Philippe, and Gabriel Cossart, eds. *Sacrosancta concilia ad regiam editionem exacta*. Volume 7. Paris: Societas typographica librorum ecclesiasticorum, 1671.
- Lemerle, Paul, ed. *Les plus anciens recueils des miracles de saint Démétrius*. Vol. 1. Paris: Éditions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1979.
- Mansi, G. D., ed. *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*. Vol. 13. Paris: Hubert Welter, 1902.
- Minucius Felix. *M. Minuci Felicis: Octavius*. BSGRT. Edited by Bernhard Kytzler. Leipzig: Teubner, 1982.
- Mombritius, Boninus, ed. *Sanctuarium seu vitae sanctorum*. With additions and corrections by A. Brunet and H. Quentin. Vol. 2. Paris: Fontemoing, 1910.
- Ohme, Heinz, ed. *Concilium quinisextum = Das Konzil Quinisextum*. Turnhout: Brepols, 2006.
- Origen. *Der Römerbriefkommentar des Origenes: Kritische Ausgabe der Übersetzung Rufins*. 3 vols. AGLB 16, 33, 34. Edited by Caroline B. Hammond Bammel. Freiburg: Herder, 1990.
- . *Origen: On First Principles*. 2 vols. OECT. Edited by John Behr. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.
- . *Origène: Contre Celse*. Tome 2, *Livres III et IV*. SC 136. Edited by Marcel Borrett. Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1968.
- . *Origène: Homélie sur la Genèse*. SC 7. Edited by Louis Doutreleau. Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1996.
- . *Origène: Homélie sur l'Exode*. SC 321. Edited by Marcel Borret. Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1985.
- Ostrogorsky, Georg, ed. *Studien zur Geschichte des byzantinischen Bilderstreits*. Historische Untersuchungen 5. Breslau: Marcus, 1929.
- Paulinus of Nola. *Sancti Pontii Meropii Paulini Nolani: Opera*. Vol. 2, *Carmina, indices et addenda*. CSEL 30. Edited by W. Hartel. Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1949.
- Pitra, Jean-Baptiste, ed. *Spicilegium solesmense: Complectens sanctorum patrum scriptorumque ecclesiasticorum anecdota batenus opera*. 4 vols. Paris: Didot, 1852-58.

- Plato. *Les lois, livres XI-XII*. Edited by A. Diès and E. des Places. Vol. 12 of *Platon: Oeuvres complètes*. 2nd rev. ed. Paris: "Les Belles Lettres." 1976.
- Plutarch. *Plutarchi: Vitae parallelae*. BSGRT. Edited by K. Ziegler. Leipzig: Teubner, 1957.
- . *Plutarch's "De Iside et Osiride."* Edited by John Gwyn Griffiths. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1970.
- Pseudo-Dionysius. *Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita: Corpus Dionysiacum*. Band 1, *De divinis nominibus*. PTS 33. Edited by Beate Regina Suchla. Berlin: De Gruyter, 1990.
- Stern, Menahem, eds. *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*. 3 vols. Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1974.
- Tacitus. *Cornelii Taciti libri qui supersunt: "Ab excessu divi Augusti," libri I-VI*. Vol. 1, pt. 1. BSGRT. Edited by Stephanus Borzsák and Kenneth Wellesley. Leipzig: Teubner, 1992.
- Tertullian. *Tertulliani opera*. Pars 1, *Opera catholica, Adversus Marcionem*. CCSL 1. Edited by E. Dekkers. Turnhout: Brepols, 1954.
- . *Tertulliani opera*. Pars 2, *Opera montanistica*. CCSL 2. Edited by A. Gerlo, E. Kroymann, J. H. Waszink, J. W. P. Borleffs, A. Reifferscheid, G. Wissowa, E. Dekkers, et al. Turnhout: Brepols, 1954.
- . *Tertullien: Contre Marcion*. Tome 2. SC 368. Edited by René Braun. Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1991.
- Theodore of Mopsuestia. *Les homélies catéchétiques de Théodore de Mopsueste*. Studi e testi 145. Edited by R. Tonneau and R. Devreesse. Vatican: Biblioteca apostolica vaticana, 1949.
- Thümmel, H. G. *Die Frühgeschichte der östkirchlichen Bilderlehre: Texte und Untersuchungen zur Zeit vor dem Bilderstreit*. Texte und Untersuchungen 139. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1992.
- Varro. *M. Terentius Varro: Antiquitates rerum divinarum*. 2 vols. Edited by Burkhart Cardauns. Mainz: Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur, 1976.
- Vives, José, ed. *Concilios visigóticos e hispano-romanos*. España cristiana: textos 1. Barcelona: Consejo superior de investigaciones científicas, 1963.

SECONDARY SOURCES

- Aldrete, Gregory S. *Gestures and Acclamations in Ancient Rome*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999.

- Alexander, Paul J. "Church Councils and Patristic Authority: The Iconoclastic Council of Hieria (754) and St. Sophia (815)." *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 63 (1958): 493-505.
- . "Hypatius of Ephesus: A Note on Image Worship in the Sixth Century." *Harvard Theological Review* 45 (1952): 177-84.
- . *The Patriarch Nicephorus of Constantinople: Ecclesiastical Policy and Image Worship in the Byzantine Empire*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958.
- Allen, Pauline, and Bronwen Neil, eds. *Maximus the Confessor and His Companions: Documents from Exile*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Altmann, Alexander. "Homo Imago Dei in Jewish and Christian Theology." *Journal of Religion* 48 (1968): 235-59.
- Amidon, Philip. *The Church History of Rufinus of Aquileia, Books 10 and 11*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Anderson, David, trans. *St. Basil the Great: On the Holy Spirit*. PPS 5. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2011.
- Ando, Clifford. *The Matter of the Gods: Religion and the Roman Empire*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008.
- . "Praesentia Numinis, Part 1: The Visibility of Roman Gods." *Asdiwal* 5 (2010): 45-73.
- Anton, John P. "Plotinus' Conception of the Functions of the Artist." *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 26, no. 1 (1967): 91-101.
- Arbeiter, Achim. "Die Mosaiken." In *Das Mausoleum der Constantina in Rom, Spätantiken Rundbauten in Rom und Latium 4*, edited by J.J. Rasch and Arbeiter. Mainz: P. von Zabern, 2007.
- Archer, Gleason, trans. *Jerome's Commentary on Daniel*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1958.
- Aune, David. "Heracles and Christ: Heracles Imagery in the Christology of Early Christianity." In *Greeks, Romans, and Christians*, edited by D. Balch, E. Ferguson, and W. Meeks, 3-19. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990.
- Awes Freeman, Jennifer. *The Ashburnham Pentateuch and Its Contexts: The Trinity in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*. Woodbridge, UK: D. S. Brewer, 2022.
- Babbitt, Frank Cole, trans. *Plutarch's "Moralia."* LCL. London: Heinemann, 1936.
- Babcock, William, trans. *The City of God*. The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century. Part 1. Hyde Park, NY: New City Press,

2013.

- Bacci, Michele. *The Many Faces of Christ*. London: Reaktion Books, 2014.
- Baldini, A. "Problemi della tradizione sulla 'distruzione' del Serapeo di Alessandria." *Rivista storica dell'antichità* 15 (1985): 97-152.
- Bamberger, John E., trans. *Evagrius Ponticus: "The Praktikos" and "Chapters on Prayer"*. Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian, 1981.
- Barasch, Moshe. *Icon: Studies in the History of an Idea*. New York: New York University Press, 1992.
- . *Theories of Art: From Plato to Winkelman*. New York: New York University Press, 1985.
- Barber, Charles. *Figure and Likeness: On The Limits of Representation in Byzantine Iconoclasm*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002.
- Barclay, John M. "Snarling Sweetly: Josephus on Images and Idolatry." In *Idolatry: False Worship in the Bible, Early Judaism, and Christianity*, edited by Stephen C. Barton, 73-87. London: T&T Clark, 2007.
- Barnard, Leslie W. *The Graeco-Roman and Oriental Background of the Iconoclastic Controversy*. Leiden: Brill, 1974.
- Barnes, Timothy. *Constantine and Eusebius*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984.
- Barr, James. "Theophany and Anthropomorphism in the Old Testament." In *Congress Volume: Oxford 1959*, edited by G. W. Anderson, P. A. H. de Boer, G. R. Castellino, Henri Cazelles, E. Hammershaimb, H. G. May, and W. Zimmerli. Supplement, *Vetus Testamentum* 7, 31-38. Leiden: Brill, 1960.
- Behr, John, trans. *Athanasius: On the Incarnation*. PPS 44b. Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2011.
- Belting, Hans. *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*. Translated by E. Jephcott. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.
- Berg, Beverly. "Alcestis and Hercules in the Catacomb of Via Latina." *Vigiliae Christianae* 48, no. 3 (1994): 219-34.
- Bergmeier, Armin. "The *Traditio Legis* in Late Antiquity and Its Afterlives in the Middle Ages." *Gesta* 56 (2017): 27-53.
- Besançon, Alain. *The Forbidden Image: An Intellectual History of Iconoclasm*. Translated by Jane Marie Todd. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.
- Bevan, Edwyn. *Holy Images: An Inquiry into Idolatry and Image-Worship in Ancient Paganism and in Christianity*. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1940.
- Bigham, Steven. *Early Christian Attitudes toward Images*. Rollingsford, NH: Orthodox Research Institute, 2004.

- . *Epiphanius of Salamis: Doctor of Iconoclasm? Deconstruction of a Myth*. Rollingsford, NH: Orthodox Research Institute, 2008.
- Binder, Stéphanie. *Tertullian, "On Idolatry" and Mishnah "Avodah Zarah": Questioning the Parting of the Ways between Christians and Jews*. Leiden: Brill, 2012.
- Birnbaum, Ellen. *The Place of Judaism in Philo's Thought: Israel, Jews, and Proselytes*. Atlanta: Scholars, 1996.
- Bisconti, Fabrizio. "The Emergence of Christian Art: Old Themes and New Meanings." In *Transition to Christianity: Art of Late Antiquity, 3rd-7th Century ad*, edited by A. Lazaridou, 58-60. New York: Onassis Foundation, 2011.
- Bitton-Ashkelony, Brouria. *Encountering the Sacred: The Debate on Christian Pilgrimage in Late Antiquity*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005.
- . *The Ladder of Prayer and the Ship of Stirrings: The Praying Self in Late Antique East Syrian Christianity*. Leuven: Peeters, 2019.
- Bland, Kalman. *The Artless Jew: Medieval and Modern Affirmations and Denials of the Visual*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.
- Bond, Helen. "Standards, Shields, and Coins: Jewish Reactions to Aspects of the Roman Cult in the Time of Pilate." In *Idolatry: False Worship in the Bible, Early Judaism, and Christianity*, edited by Stephen C. Barton, 88-106. London: T&T Clark, 2007.
- Bovon, François. "Fragment Oxyrhynchus 840, Fragment of a Lost Gospel, Witness of an Early Christian Controversy over Purity." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 119, no. 4 (2000): 705-28.
- Bowes, Kim. *Private Worship, Public Values, and Religious Change in Late Antiquity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.
- Boys-Stones, George, John M. Dillon, Lloyd P. Gerson, R. A. H. King, Andrew Smith, and James Wilberding, trans. *Plotinus: The Enneads*. Edited by Gerson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.
- Bradbury, Scott. "Constantine and the Problem of Anti-pagan Legislation in the Fourth Century." *Classical Philology* 82 (1994): 120-39.
- Bradshaw, Paul, and Maxwell Johnson. *The Eucharistic Liturgies: Their Evolution and Interpretation*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012.
- Brandenburg, Hugo. "Ars Humilis: Zur Frage eines christlichen Stils in der Kunst des 4. Jahrhunderts nach Christus." *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 24 (1981): 71-84.
- Brandt, Olof. "Deer, Lambs, and Water in the Lateran Baptistery." *Rivista di archeologia cristiana* 81 (2005): 131-56.

- Breckenridge, James. *Likeness: A Conceptual History of Ancient Portraiture*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968.
- . "The Reception of Art into the Early Church." In *Atti del IX Congresso internazionale di archeologia cristiana*, vol. 1, 361–69. Vatican City: Pontificio istituto di archeologia cristiana, 1978.
- Brenk, Beat. *The Apse, the Image, and the Icon: An Historical Perspective of the Apse as a Space for Images*. Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2010.
- Brent, Alan. *Hippolytus and the Roman Church in the Third Century: Communities in Tension before the Emergence of a Monarch-Bishop*. Leiden: Brill, 1995.
- Brilliant, Richard. *Gesture and Rank in Roman Art: The Use of Gestures to Denote Status in Roman Sculpture and Coinage*. New Haven: Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1963.
- Browett, Rebecca. "Touching the Holy: The Rise of Contact Relics in Medieval England." *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 68 (2017): 493–509.
- Brown, Peter. *The Cult of Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981.
- . "Images as a Substitute for Writing." In *East and West: Modes of Communication*, edited by Evangelos Chrysos and Ian Wood, 15–34. Leiden: Brill, 1999.
- . *Society and the Holy*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982.
- Browning, Robert. "Biography." In *Latin Literature*, edited by E.J. Kenney and W.V. Clausen, 723–31. Vol. 2 of *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982.
- Brubaker, Leslie, and John Haldon. *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- Bucur, Bogdan G. "The Early Christian Reception of Genesis 18: From Theophany to Trinitarian Symbolism." *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 23, no. 2 (2015): 245–72.
- . *Scripture Re-envisioned: Christophanic Exegesis and the Making of a Christian Bible*. Leiden: Brill, 2019.
- Bury, Robert Gregg, trans. *Plato: Laws*. LCL. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984.
- Bynum, Caroline Walker. *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe*. New York: Zone, 2011.
- Cameron, Alan. "Palladas and Christian Polemic." *Journal of Roman Studies* 55 (1965): 17–30.

- Cameron, Averil. "The History of the Image of Edessa: The Telling of a Story." In *Okeanos: Essays Presented to I. Sevcenko*, Harvard Ukrainian Studies 7, 80-94. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983.
- . "The Mandylion and Byzantine Iconoclasm." In *The Holy Face and the Paradox of Representation*, edited by H. Kessler and G. Wolf, 33-54. Bologna: Nuova Alfa, 1998.
- . "The Sceptic and the Shroud: Inaugural Lecture at King's College London, April 1980." In *Continuity and Change in Sixth-Century Byzantium*, 3-27. London: Variorum Reprints, 1981.
- Cameron, Averil, and Stuart G. Hall, trans. *Eusebius: Life of Constantine*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1999.
- Cancik, Hubert, and Hildegard Cancik-Lindemaier. "The Truth of Images: Cicero and Varro on Image Worship." In *Representation in Religion: Studies in Honor of Moshe Barasch*, edited by J. Assmann and A. Baumgarten, 43-61. Leiden: Brill, 2001.
- Cantino Wataghin, Gisella. "I primi cristiani, tra images, historiae e pictura: Spunti di riflessione." *Antiquité tardive* 19 (2011): 13-33.
- Caseau, Béatrice. "Religious Intolerance and Pagan Statuary." In *The Archaeology of Late Antique 'Paganism,'* edited by L. Lavan and M. Mulryan, 479-502. Leiden: Brill, 2011.
- Castelli, Elizabeth. "Asterius of Amasea: Ekphrasis on the Holy Martyr Euphemia." In *Religions of Late Antiquity in Practice*, edited by R. Valantasis, 462-81. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.
- Chadwick, Henry. *The Early Church*. London: Penguin, 1967.
- , trans. *Origen: Contra Celsum*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953.
- , trans. *Saint Augustine: Confessions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991.
- Charles-Murray, Mary. "Art and the Early Church." *Journal of Theological Studies*, n.s. 28 (1977): 303-45.
- . *Rebirth and Afterlife: A Study of the Transmutation of Some Pagan Imagery in Early Christian Funerary Art*. Oxford: BAR International Series, 1981.
- Chazelle, Celia. "Pictures, Books, and the Illiterate: Pope Gregory I's Letters to Serenus of Marseilles." *Word and Image* 6 (1990): 138-53.
- Clark, Elizabeth. *The Origenist Controversy: The Cultural Construction of an Early Christian Debate*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.

- Clark, Gillian. *Christianity and Roman Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- . "Victricius of Rouen: Praising the Saints." *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 7 (1999): 364–99.
- Clarke, Emma C., John C. Dillon, and Jackson P. Hershbell, trans. *Iamblichus: On the Mysteries*. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003.
- Clarke, Graeme W., trans. *The "Octavius" of Marcus Minucius Felix*. New York: Newman, 1974.
- Cohoon, J. W., trans. *Dio Chrysostom: Discourses 12–13*. LCL 339. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1939.
- Conybeare, F. C., trans. *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana, the Epistles of Apollonius and the Treatise of Eusebius*. LCL. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1912.
- Cormack, Robin. *Icons*. London: British Museum Press, 2007.
- . *Writing in Gold: Byzantine Society and Its Icons*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.
- Couzin, Robert. "'Early' 'Christian' 'Art.'" In *The Routledge Handbook of Early Christian Art*, edited by R. Jensen and M. Ellison, 380–92. London: Routledge, 2018.
- . *Right and Left in Early Christian and Medieval Art*. Leiden: Brill, 2021.
- . "Syncretism and Segregation in Early Christian Art." *Studies in Iconography* 38 (2017): 18–54.
- . *The "Traditio Legis": Anatomy of an Image*. Oxford: Archaeopress, 2015.
- Crehan, Joseph Hugh. *Athenagoras: "Embassy for the Christians," "The Resurrection of the Dead."* ACW 23. New York: Paulist Press, 1956.
- Crisafulli, Virgil S., trans. *The Miracles of St. Artemios: A Collection of Miracle Stories by an Anonymous Author of Seventh-Century Byzantium*. Edited by Crisafulli and John W. Nesbit. Leiden: Brill, 1996.
- Cross, F. L., trans. *Saint Cyril of Jerusalem: Lectures on the Christian Sacraments*. PPS 2. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1977.
- Cutler, Anthony. "The Right Hand's Cunning: Craftsmanship and the Demand for Art in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages." *Speculum* 72 (1997): 971–94.
- Dagron, Gilbert. "Holy Images and Likenesses." *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 45 (1991): 23–33.
- Day, Juliette. "Seeing Christ at the Holy Places." In *Spaces in Late Antiquity: Cultural, Theological and Archaeological Perspectives*, edited by J. Day, R. Hakola, M. Kahlos, and U. Tervahauta, 69–88. London: Routledge, 2016.

- de Blaauw, Sible. "Das Fastigium der Lateranbasilika: Schöpferische Innovation, Unikat oder Paradigma." In *Innovation in der Spätantike: Kolloquium Basel 6. und 9. Mai 1994*, edited by B. Brenk, 53–65. Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1996.
- . "Imperial Connotations in Roman Church Interiors: The Significance and Effect of the Lateran *Fastigium*." In *Imperial Art as Christian Art, Christian Art as Imperial Art: Expression and Meaning in Art and Architecture from Constantine to Justinian*, edited by J. R. Brandt and O. Steen, 137–46. Rome: Bardi, 2001.
- Defarrari, Roy J., trans. *Saint Basil: The Letters*. Vol. 1. LCL. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961.
- DelCogliano, Mark. "Situating Sarapion's Sorrow: The Anthropomorphite Controversy as the Historical and Theological Context of Cassian's Tenth Conference on Pure Prayer." *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 38, no. 4 (2003): 377–421.
- Deliyannis, Deborah Mauskopf. *Ravenna in Late Antiquity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Dell'Acqua, Francesca, and Ernesto Sergio Mainoldi, eds. *Pseudo-Dionysius and Christian Visual Culture, c. 500–900*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave MacMillan, 2020.
- Delling, Gerhard. "The 'One Who Sees God' in Philo." In *Nourished with Peace: Studies in Hellenistic Judaism in Memory of Samuel Sandmel*, edited by F. G. Greenspan, E. Hilgert, and B. M. Mack, 27–41. Chico, CA: Scholars, 1984.
- Dennis, Nathan. "Visualizing Trinitarian Space in the Albenga Baptistery." In *Perceptions of the Body and Space in Late Antiquity and Byzantium*, edited by J. Bogdanović, 124–48. London: Routledge, 2018.
- Di Berardino, Angelo, ed. *Encyclopedia of Ancient Christianity*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic; Boston: Credo Reference, 2015.
- Dick, Michael B. "Prophetic Parodies of Making the Cult Image." In *Born in Heaven, Made on Earth: The Making of the Cult Image in the Ancient Near East*, edited by Dick, 1–53. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1999.
- Donohue, A. A. *Xoana and the Origins of Greek Sculpture*. Atlanta: Scholars, 1988.
- Dresken-Weiland, Jutta. "Bilder im Grab und ihre Bedeutung im Kontext der Christianisierung der frühchristlichen Welt." *Antiquité tardive* 19 (2011): 63–78.
- . "Christian Sarcophagi from Rome." In *The Routledge Handbook of Early Christian Art*, edited by R. Jensen and M. Ellison, 39–55. London: Routledge,

2018.

- Drijvers, Hans J. W. "The Image of Edessa in the Syriac Tradition." In *The Holy Face and the Paradox of Representation*, edited by H. Kessler and G. Wolf, 13–31. Bologna: Nuova Alfa, 1998.
- Duggan, Lawrence. "Was Art Really the 'Book of the Illiterate'?" *Word and Image* 5, no. 3 (1989): 227–51.
- Elliott, J. K., trans. *The Apocryphal New Testament*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1993.
- Elsner, Jaś. "Archaeologies and Agendas: Reflections on Late Antique Jewish Art and Early Christian Art." *Journal of Roman Studies* 93 (2003): 114–28.
- . *Art and the Roman Viewer: The Transformation of Art from the Pagan World to Christianity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- . "Between Mimesis and Divine Power: Visuality in the Greco-Roman World." In *Visuality before and beyond the Renaissance: Seeing as Others Saw*, edited by Robert Nelson, 45–69. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- . *Imperial Rome and Christian Triumph*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- . "Perspectives in Art." In *The Cambridge Companion to Constantine*, edited by N. Lenski, 255–77. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- . *Roman Eyes: Visuality and Subjectivity in Art and Text*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007.
- Estienne, Sylvia. "Simulacrum Deorum versus Ornamenta Aedium: The Status of Divine Images in the Temples of Rome." In *Divine Images and Human Imaginations in Ancient Greece and Rome*, edited by Joannis Mylonopoulos, 257–71. Leiden: Brill, 2015.
- Fasola, Umberto. *Le catacombe di S. Gennaro a Capodimonte*. Rome: Editalia, 1975.
- Fejfer, Jane. *Roman Portraits in Context*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2007.
- Fine, Steven. *Art and Judaism in the Greco-Roman World: Toward a New Jewish Archaeology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- . "'When I Went to Rome . . . There I Saw the Menorah . . .': The Jerusalem Temple Implements during the Second Century CE." In *The Archeology of Difference: Gender, Ethnicity, Class, and the "Other" in Antiquity: Studies in Honor of Eric C. Meyers*, edited by D. R. Edwards and C. T. McCollough, 169–80. Boston: American Schools of Oriental Research, 2007.
- Finkelberg, Margalit. "Two Kinds of Representations in Greek Religious Art." In *Representations in Religion: Studies in Honor of Moshe Barash*, edited by J. Assmann and A. Baumgarten, 27–41. Leiden: Brill, 2001.

- Finney, Paul Corby. "Alcune note a proposito delle immagini carpocraziane di Gesù." *Rivista di archeologia cristiana* 57 (1981): 35-41.
- . "Images on Finger Rings and Early Christian Art." *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 41 (1987): 181-86.
- . *The Invisible God*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Florovsky, George. "Origen, Eusebius, and the Iconoclastic Controversy." *Church History* 19, no. 2 (1950): 77-96.
- Foletti, Ivan. "God from God." In *The Fifth Century in Rome: Art, Liturgy, Patronage*, edited by Foletti and M. Gianandrea, 11-29. Rome: Viella, 2017.
- Foletti, Ivan, and Irene Quandri. "Roma, l'Oriente e il mito della Traditio Legis." *Opuscula historiae artium* 62, suppl. (2013): 16-37.
- Fox, Robin Lane. *Pagans and Christians*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987.
- Francis, James. "Clement of Alexandria on Signet Rings: Reading an Image at the Dawn of Christian Art." *Classical Philology* 98 (2003): 179-83.
- Frank, Georgia. *The Memory of the Eyes: Pilgrims to Living Saints in Christian Late Antiquity*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.
- . "The Pilgrim's Gaze in the Age before Icons." In *Visuality before and beyond the Renaissance*, edited by R. Nelson, 98-115. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- . "Taste and See: The Eucharist and the Eyes of Faith in the Fourth Century." *Church History* 70, no. 4 (2001): 619-43.
- Frankfurter, David. "Iconoclasms and Christianization in Late Antique Egypt." In *From Temple to Church: Destruction and Renewal of Local Cultic Topography in Late Antiquity*, edited by J. Hahn, S. Emmel, and U. Gotter, 135-59. Leiden: Brill, 2015.
- Freedberg, David. *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989.
- Gaddis, Michael. *There Is No Crime for Those Who Have Christ: Religious Violence in the Christian Roman Empire*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005.
- Gaifman, Milette. *Aniconism in Greek Antiquity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Gamble, Harry Y. "Euhemerism and Christology in Origen: Contra Celsum III 22-43." *Vigiliae Christianae* 33 (1979): 12-29.
- Gaston, Robert. "British Travellers and Scholars in the Roman Catacombs." *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 46 (1983): 144-65.
- Gero, Stephen. "Hypatius of Ephesus on the Cult of Image." In *Christianity, Judaism, and Other Greco-Roman Cults: Studies for Morton Smith at Sixty*,

- edited by J. Neusner, pt. 2, *Early Christianity*, 208–16. Leiden: Brill, 1975.
- . “The True Image of Christ: Eusebius’ Letter to Constantia Reconsidered.” *Journal of Theological Studies*, n.s. 32 (1981): 460–70.
- Gibbon, Edward. *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Reprint, London: G. Cowie, 1825.
- Gladigow, Burkhard. “Präsenz der Bilder—Präsenz der Götter: Kultbilder und Bilder der Götter in der griechischen Religion.” *Visible Religion* 4–5 (1985–86): 114–33.
- . “Zur Ikonographie und Pragmatik römischen Kultbilder.” In *Iconologia Sacra: Mythos, Bildkunst und Dichtung in der Religions- und Sozialgeschichte Alteuropas—Festschrift für Karl Hauck zum 75. Geburtstag*, edited by H. Keller and N. Staubach, 9–24. Berlin: De Gruyter, 1994.
- Gordon, Richard L. “The Real and Imaginary: Production and Religion in the Graeco-Roman World.” *Art History* 2, no. 1 (1979): 5–34.
- Gottstein, Alon Goshen. “The Body as Image of God in Rabbinic Literature.” *Harvard Theological Review* 87 (1994): 171–95.
- Gould, Graham. “The Image of God and the Anthropomorphic Controversy in Fourth Century Monasticism.” In *Origeniana Quinta*, edited by R. Daly, 549–57. Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1992.
- Grabar, André. *Christian Iconography: A Study of Its Origins*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968.
- . *L'empereur dans l'art byzantin*. Paris: Les belles lettres, 1936.
- Gradel, Ittai. *Emperor Worship and Roman Religion*. Oxford: Clarendon, 2002.
- Griffin, Carl W., and David L. Paulsen. “Augustine and the Corporeality of God.” *Harvard Theological Review* 95 (2002): 97–118.
- Grig, Lucy. *Making Martyrs in Late Antiquity*. London: Duckworth, 2004.
- Grigg, Robert. “Aniconic Worship and the Apologetic Tradition: A Note on Canon 36 of the Council of Elvira.” *Church History* 45 (1976): 428–33.
- . “Constantine the Great and the Cult without Images.” *Viator* 8 (1977): 1–32.
- Guscin, Mark. *The Tradition of the Image of Edessa*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2016.
- Guthrie, Stewart E. *Faces in the Clouds: A New Theory of Religion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Gutmann, Joseph. “The Second Commandment and the Image in Judaism.” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 32 (1961): 161–74.

- Hachlili, Rachel. *Ancient Jewish Art and Archeology in the Land of Israel*. Leiden: Brill, 1988.
- Hadot, Pierre. *Plotinus, or The Simplicity of Vision*. Translated by Michael Chase. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993.
- Hahn, Cynthia. "Seeing and Believing: The Construction of Sanctity in Early Medieval Saints' Shrines." *Speculum* 72 (1978): 1079-93.
- Hahn, Johannes. "The Conversion of the Cult Statues: The Destruction of the Serapeum 392 a.d. and the Transformation of Alexandria into the 'Christ-Loving' City." In *From Temple to Church: Destruction and Renewal of Local Cultic Topography in Late Antiquity*, edited by J. Hahn, S. Emmel, and U. Gotter, 335-63. Leiden: Brill, 2015.
- Halbatal, M., and A. Margalit. *Idolatry*. Translated by Naomi Goldblum. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992.
- Hannestad, Niels. "How Did Rising Christianity Cope with Pagan Sculpture?" In *East and West: Modes of Communication*, edited by Evangelos Chrysos and Ian Wood, 173-204. Leiden: Brill, 1999.
- Harley-McGowan, Felicity. "From Victim to Victor: Developing an Iconography of Suffering in Early Christian Art." In *The Art of Empire: Christian Art in Its Imperial Context*, edited by L.M. Jefferson and R.M. Jensen, 115-58. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015.
- Harvey, Susan Ashbrook. *Scenting Salvation: Ancient Christianity and the Olfactory Imagination*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006.
- Hefele, Charles Joseph. *A History of the Christian Councils*. Edited and translated by W. Clark. 2nd ed. Vol. 1. London: T&T Clark, 1894.
- Hellemo, Geir. "Theme Group II: Christ as Lawgiver among the Apostle Princes." In *Adventus Domini: Eschatological Thought in 4th-Century Apses and Catecheses*, 65-89. VCS 5. Leiden: Brill, 1989.
- Hershkowitz, Paula. *Prudentius, Spain, and Late Antique Christianity: Poetry, Visual Culture, and the Cult of Martyrs*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.
- Hill, Edmund, trans. *Newly Discovered Sermons*. The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century. Pt. 3, vol. 11. Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1991.
- , trans. *Sermons*. The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century. Pt. 3, vol. 2. Edited by John E. Rotelle. Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1990.
- , trans. *The Trinity*. The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century. Pt. 1, vol. 5. Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1991.

- Holl, Karl. "Die Schriften des Epiphanius gegen die Bilderverehrung." In *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte*, Band 2, *Der Osten*, 351–87. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1916.
- Hollerich, Michael. *Eusebius of Caesarea's Commentary on Isaiah: Christian Exegesis in the Age of Constantine*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1999.
- Holloway, Ross. *Constantine and Rome*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004.
- Hornik, Heidi J. "Freestanding Sculpture." In *The Routledge Handbook of Early Christian Art*, edited by R. Jensen and M. Ellison, 73–85. London: Routledge, 2018.
- Howard, George, trans. *The Teaching of Addai: Texts and Translations*. Chico, CA: Scholars, 1981.
- Hunter, David. "Vigilantius of Calagurris and Victricius of Rouen: Ascetics, Relics, and Clerics in Late Roman Gaul." *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 7 (1999): 401–30.
- Huskinson, Janet. "Some Pagan Mythological Figures and Their Significance in Early Christian Art." *Papers of the British School at Rome* 42 (1974): 68–97.
- Iara, Kristine. "Seeing the Gods in Late Antique Rome." In *Seeing the God: Image, Space, Performance, and Vision in the Religion of the Roman Empire*, edited by Marlis Arnhold, Harry O. Maier, and Jörg Rüpke, 60–84. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018.
- Ivanović, Filip. "Pseudo-Dionysius and the Importance of Sensible Things." In *Pseudo-Dionysius and Christian Visual Culture, c. 500–900*, edited by Francesca Dell'Acqua and Ernesto Sergio Mainoldi, 77–88. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.
- Jacobs, Ine. "Production to Destruction? Pagan and Mythological Statuary in Asia Minor." *American Journal of Archaeology* 114 (2010): 267–303.
- James, Liz. "'Pray Not to Fall into Temptation and Be on Your Guard': Pagan Statues in Christian Constantinople." *Gesta* 35 (1996): 12–20.
- Jensen, Hans J. L. "Aniconic Propaganda in the Hebrew Bible; or: The Possible Birth of Religious Seriousness." *Religion* 47 (2018): 399–407.
- Jensen, Robin M. *The Cross: History, Art, and Controversy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017.
- . "Early Christian Visual Theology: Iconography of the Trinity and Christ." In *Image as Theology*, edited by C. Strine, A. Torrance, and M. McInroy. Turnhout: Brepols, forthcoming.
- . "The Economy of the Trinity at the Creation of Adam and Eve." *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 7, no. 4 (1999): 527–46.

- . *Face to Face: The Portrait of the Divine in Early Christianity*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005.
- . “Paul in Art.” In *The Blackwell Companion to Paul*, edited by Stephen Westerholm, 507–30. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011.
- . “The Polymorphous Christ in Early Christian Image and Text.” In *Seeing the God: Image, Space, Performance, and Vision in the Religion of the Roman Empire*, edited by M. Arnhold, H. Maier, and J. Rüpke, 149–75. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018.
- . “The Three Hebrew Youths and the Problem of the Emperor’s Portrait in Early Christianity.” In *Jewish Art in Its Late Antique Context*, edited by Uzi Leibner and Catherine Hezser, 303–20. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016.
- . *Understanding Early Christian Art*. London: Routledge, 2000.
- . “Visual Representations of Early Christian Teachers and of Christ as the True Philosopher.” In *Christian Teachers in Second-Century Rome: Schools and Students in the Ancient City*, edited by H. Gregory Snyder, 60–83. Leiden: Brill, 2020.
- Jervell, Jacob. “Imagines und Imago Dei: Aus der Genesis-Exegese des Josephus.” In *Josephus-Studien: Untersuchungen zu Josephus, dem antiken Judentum und dem Neuen Testament*, edited by O. Betz, K. Haacker, and M. Hengel, 197–204. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1974.
- Johnson, Maxwell. “Christian Initiation in Fourth-Century Jerusalem and Recent Developments in the Study of the Sources.” *Ecclesia Orans* 26 (2009): 143–61.
- Jones, Christopher. *Between Pagans and Christians*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014.
- Junod-Ammerbauer, Helena. “Les constructions de Nole et l’esthétique de saint Paulin.” *Revue des études augustinienes* 24 (1978): 22–57.
- Kabala, Irene. “Halo.” In *The Eerdmans Encyclopedia of Early Christian Art and Archaeology*, vol. 1, edited by P. C. Finney, 627–28. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2017.
- Kahlos, Maijastina. “The Emperor’s New Images—How to Honour the Emperor in the Christian Roman Empire?” In *Emperors and the Divine—Rome and Its Influence*, edited by Kahlos, 119–38. Helsinki: Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies, 2014.
- Kampen, Natalie. “What Is a Man?” In *What Is a Man? Changing Images of Masculinity in Late Antique Art*, edited by Kampen, E. Marlowe, and R. Holholt, 3–15. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002.

- Kartsonis, Anna. "The Responding Icon." In *Heaven on Earth: Art and the Byzantine Church*, edited by Linda Safran, 58–80. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004.
- Keel, Othmar, and Christoph Uehlinger. *Göttinnen, Götter und Gottessymbole: Neue Erkenntnisse zur Religionsgeschichte Kanaans und Israels aufgrund bislang unerschlossener ikonographischer Quellen*. Fribourg: Academic Press Fribourg, 1992.
- Kessler, Herbert. *Spiritual Seeing: Picturing God's Invisibility in Medieval Art*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000.
- Kessler, Herbert, and Gerhard Wolf, eds. *The Holy Face and the Paradox of Representation*. Bologna: Nuova Alfa, 1998.
- Kiernan, Philip. *Roman Cult Images: The Lives and Worship of Idols from the Iron Age to Late Antiquity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020.
- Killerich, Bente. "Sculpture in the Round in the Early Byzantine Period: Constantinople and the East." In *Aspects of Late Antiquity and Early Byzantium*, edited by L. Rydén and J.O. Rosenqvist, 85–97. Stockholm: Swedish Research Institute, 1993.
- Kitzinger, Ernst. *Byzantine Art in the Making*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980.
- . "The Cult of Images in the Age before Iconoclasm." *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 8 (1954): 85–150.
- Klauser, Theodor. "Der Beitrag der orientalischen Religionen, insbesondere des Christentums, zur spätantiken und frühmittelalterlichen Kunst." In *Atti del Convegno internazionale sul tema: Tardo antico e alto medioevo*, 32–98. Rome: Accademia nazionale dei Lincei, 1968.
- . "Die Äusserungen der Alten Kirche zur Kunst: Revision der Zeugnisse, Folgerungen für die archäologische Forschung." In *Atti del VI Congresso internazionale di archeologia cristiana*, 223–42. Vatican City: Pontificio istituto di archeologia cristiana, 1965.
- . "Erwägungen zur Entstehung der altchristlichen Kunst." *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 76 (1965): 1–11.
- Knohl, Israel. "Post-biblical Sectarianism and Priestly Schools of the Pentateuch: The Issue of Popular Participation in the Temple Cult on Festivals." In *The Madrid Qumran Congress*, edited by J.T. Barrera and L. Vegas Montaner, vol. 2, 601–9. Leiden: Brill, 1992.
- Koch, Hugo. *Die altchristliche Bilderfrage nach den literarischen Quellen*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1917.

- Kotoula, Dimitra. "Experiencing the Miracle: Animated Images and the Senses in the Burial Chapel of the Byzantine Saint." In *The Multi-sensory Image from Antiquity to the Renaissance*, edited by H. Hunter-Crawley and E. O'Brien, 86–106. London: Routledge, 2019.
- Krisak, Len, trans. *Prudentius's Crown of Martyrs*. London: Routledge, 2019.
- Kristensen, Troels M. "Embodied Images: Christian Response and Destruction in Late Antique Egypt." *Journal of Late Antiquity* 2, no. 2 (2009): 224–50.
- . *Making and Breaking the Gods: Christian Responses to Pagan Statuary in Late Antiquity*. Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2013.
- . "Miraculous Bodies: Christian Viewers and the Transformation of 'Pagan' Sculpture in Late Antiquity." In *Patrons and Viewers in Late Antiquity*, edited by S. Birk and E. Poulsen, 31–66. Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2012.
- . "Religious Conflict in Late Antique Alexandria: Christian Responses to 'Pagan' Statues in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries." In *Alexandria—A Cultural and Religious Melting Pot*, edited by G. Hinge and J. Krasilnikoff, 158–75. Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2010.
- Kristensen, Troels M., and Lea Stirling, eds. *The Afterlife of Greek and Roman Sculpture: Late Antique Responses and Practices*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016.
- Kuryluk, Ewa. *Veronica and Her Cloth: History, Symbolism and Structure of a "True" Image*. New York: Basil Blackwell, 1991.
- Lander, Shira. "Revealing and Concealing God in Ancient Synagogue Art." In *Histories of the Hidden God: Concealment and Revelation in Western Gnostic, Esoteric, and Mystical Traditions*, edited by A. D. DeConick and G. Adamson, 205–16. Durham, UK: Acumen, 2013.
- Latham, Jacob. *Performance, Memory, and Processions in Ancient Rome*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016.
- Leemans, Johan, Wendy Mayer, Pauline Allen, and Boudewijn Dehandschutter. *'Let Us Die That We May Live': Greek Homilies on Christian Martyrs from Asia Minor, Palestine and Syria (c. ad 350–ad 450)*. London: Routledge, 2003.
- Lembke, Katja. "Ein Relief aus Ariccia und seine Geschichte." *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts (Rome)* 101 (1994): 97–102.
- Lepelley, Claude. "Le musée des statues divines: La volonté de sauvegarder le patrimoine artistique païen à la époque théodosienne." *Cahiers archéologiques* 42 (1994): 5–15.
- Levine, Lee I. *Visual Judaism in Late Antiquity*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012.

- Lieberman, Saul. "Mishnath Shir ha-Shirim." A Hebrew appendix in Gershom Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition*, 118–26. New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1965.
- Lieu, Samuel N.C. *The Emperor Julian: Panegyric and Polemic*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1989.
- Linant de Bellefonds, Pascale. "Rites and Activities Related to Cult Images." *Thesaurus cultus et rituum antiquorum* 2, no. 5 (2004): 418–62.
- Liverani, Paolo. "The Sunset of 3D." In *The Afterlife of Greek and Roman Sculpture*, edited by T.M. Kristensen and L. Stirling, 310–29. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016.
- Longenecker, Bruce. *The Cross before Constantine: The Early Life of a Christian Symbol*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015.
- L'Orange, H. P. "Plotinus-Paul." In *Likeness and Icon: Selected Studies in Classical and Early Mediaeval Art*, 32–42. Odense: Odense University Press, 1973.
- Louth, Andrew, trans. *Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- . "Pagan Theurgy and Christian Sacramentalism in Denys the Areopagite." *Journal of Theological Studies* 37, no. 2 (1986): 432–38.
- , trans. *St. John of Damascus: Three Treatises on the Divine Images*. PPS. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003.
- Luibheid, Colm, trans. *John Cassian: Conferences*. New York: Paulist Press, 1985.
- Maas, Paul. "Die ikonoklastische Episode in dem Brief des Epiphanius an Johannes." *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 30 (1929–30): 279–86.
- MacGregor, Neil. *Seeing Salvation: Images of Christ in Art*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000.
- Mackie, Gillian. "Symbolism and Purpose in an Early Christian Martyr Chapel: The Case of San Vittore in Ciel d'Oro, Milan." *Gesta* 34, no. 2 (1995): 91–101.
- MacMullen, Ramsay. *Changes in the Roman Empire*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990.
- . *Christianity and Paganism in the Fourth to Eighth Centuries*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997.
- . *The Second Church: Popular Christianity, a.d. 200–400*. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009.
- Madec, Goulven. "Le Christ des païens d'après le *De consensu euangelistarum* de saint Augustin." *Recherches augustiennes* 26 (1992): 3–67.

- Maguire, Henry. *Art and Eloquence in Byzantium*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981.
- . *The Icons of Their Bodies: Saints and Their Images in Byzantium*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.
- Mango, Cyril A. *The Art of the Byzantine Empire, 312-1453: Sources and Documents*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997.
- Mann, Vivian. *Jewish Texts on the Visual Arts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Maraval, Pierre. "Épiphanie, 'Docteur des iconoclastes.'" In *Nicée II, 787-1987: Douze siècles d'images religieuses*, edited by F. Boespflug and N. Lossky, 51-62. Paris: Cerf, 1987.
- Marcenaro, Mario. *Il battistero "monumentale" di Albenga, sedici secoli di storia: Aggiornamento con appunti sulle recenti indagini archeologiche*. Albenga: Delfino Moro, 2014.
- Marinescu, Constantine. "Transformation of Classical Objects and Their Re-use during Antiquity." In *Shifting Frontiers in Late Antiquity*, edited by R. Mathisen and H. Sivan, 285-98. Aldershot: Variorum, 1996.
- Markschies, Christopher. *God's Body: Jewish, Christian, and Pagan Images of God*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2019.
- Markus, Robert A. "How on Earth Could Places Become Holy? Origins of the Christian Idea of Holy Places." *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 2 (1994): 257-71.
- Marmorstein, Arthur. *Essays in Anthropomorphism*. Vol. 2 of *The Old Rabbinic Doctrine of God*. London: Oxford University Press, 1937.
- Marriott, Charles, trans. *The Homilies of S. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, on the Acts of the Apostles*. Pt. 2. Oxford: Parker, 1852.
- Marsengill, Katherine. "The Christian Reception of Sculpture in Late Antiquity and the Historical Reception of Late Antique Christian Sculpture." *Journal of the Bible and Its Reception* 1 (2014): 67-101.
- . "Panel Paintings and Early Christian Icons." In *The Routledge Handbook of Early Christian Art*, edited by R. Jensen and M. Ellison, 191-206. London: Routledge, 2018.
- . *Portraits and Icons: Between Reality and Spirituality in Byzantine Art*. Turnhout: Brepols, 2013.
- Martin, Hanz G. *Römische Tempelkultbilder: Eine archäologische Untersuchung zur späten Republik*. Rome: "L'Erma" di Bretschneider, 1992.
- Martyn, John R. C., trans. *The Letters of Gregory the Great*. 3 vols. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2004.

- Mathews, Thomas. *The Clash of Gods: A Reinterpretation of Christian Art*. Rev. ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999.
- . *The Dawn of Christian Art in Panel Painting and Icons*. With Norman E. Muller. Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2016.
- . "The Emperor and the Icon." *Acta ad archeologiam et artium historiam pertinentia* 15 (2001): 163-77.
- Mathews, Thomas, and Norman Muller. "Isis and Mary in Early Icons." In *Images of the Mother of God: Perceptions of the Theotokos in Byzantium*, edited by M. Vassiliki, 3-11. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005.
- McCracken, George E., trans. *Arnobius of Sicca: The Case against the Pagans*. 2 vols. ACW 7-8. New York: Newman, 1949.
- McEnerney, John I., trans. *St. Cyril of Alexandria: Letters 1-50*. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1987.
- McGinn, Bernard. *The Foundations of Mysticism: Origins to the Fifth Century*. Vol. 1. New York: Crossroad, 2002.
- McKitterick, Rosamond. "The Constantinian Basilica in the Early Medieval *Liber Pontificalis*." In *The Basilica of Saint John Lateran to 1600*, edited by L. Bosman, I. P. Haynes, and P. Liverani, 197-220. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020.
- Meigne, Maurice. "Concile ou collection d'Elvire?" *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 70 (1975): 361-87.
- Mercogliano, A. *Le basiliche paleocristiane di Cimitile*. Rome: Pontificio istituto di archeologia cristiana, 1968.
- Mettinger, Tryggve N. D. "Israelite Aniconism: Developments and Origins." In *The Image and the Book: Iconic Cults, Aniconism, and the Rise of Book Religion in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, edited by K. van der Toorn, 173-204. Leuven: Peeters, 1997.
- . *No Graven Images? Israelite Aniconism in Its Ancient Near Eastern Context*. Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1995.
- Meyer, R. T. "Note on Minucius Felix, Octavius 2.4." *Classical Bulletin* 31 (1963): 22.
- Miles, Margaret R. *Image as Insight: Visual Understanding in Western Christianity and Secular Culture*. Boston: Beacon, 1985.
- Miller, Patricia Cox. *The Corporeal Imagination*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009.
- . "'Differential Networks': Relics and Other Fragments in Late Antiquity." *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 6 (1998): 113-38.

- . “‘The Little Blue Flower Is Red’: Relics and the Poetizing of the Body.” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 8 (2000): 213–36.
- . “Visceral Seeing: The Holy Body in Late Antique Christianity.” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 12 (2004): 391–411.
- Mitchell, Margaret M. “The Archetypal Image: John Chrysostom’s Portraits of Paul.” *Journal of Religion* 75 (1995): 15–43.
- Morgan, David. *The Embodied Eye: Religious Visual Culture and the Social Life of Feeling*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012.
- . *Visual Piety: A History and Theory of Popular Religious Images*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.
- Morris, J. B., trans. *The Homilies of S. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, on the Epistle of S. Paul the Apostle to the Romans*. Oxford: Parker, 1841.
- Moss, Candida. “On the Dating of Polycarp: Rethinking the Place of the Martyrdom of Polycarp in the History of Christianity.” *Early Christianity* 1 (2010): 539–74.
- . “Polycarphilia: The Martyrdom of Polycarp and the Origins and Spread of Martyrdom.” In *The Rise and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries of the Common Era*, edited by C. K. Rothschild and J. Schröter, 402–17. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013.
- Munk, Ana. “Domestic Piety in Fourth Century Rome: A Relic Shrine beneath the Church of SS. Giovanni e Paolo.” *Hortus artium medievalium* 15, no. 1 (2009): 7–19.
- Murray, Gilbert. *Five Stages of Greek Religion*. Boston: Beacon, 1925.
- . *Four Stages of Greek Religion*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1912.
- Musurillo, Herbert, trans. *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1972.
- Nees, Lawrence. *Early Medieval Art*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Nicolotti, Andrea. *From the Mandylion of Edessa to the Shroud of Turin: The Metamorphosis and Manipulation of a Legend*. Leiden: Brill, 2014.
- Nicolotti, Andrea, and Alexi Lidov. “Holy Script, Holy Gate: Revealing the Edessa Paradigm in Christian Imagery.” In *Intorno al Sacro volto*, edited by A. R. Calderoni Masetti, C. Dufour Bozzo, and G. Wolf, 145–62. Venice: Marsilio, 2007.
- Niehr, Herbert. “In Search of YHWH’s Cult Statue in the First Temple.” In *The Image and the Book: Iconic Cults, Aniconism, and the Rise of Book Religion*

- in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, edited by K. van der Toorn, 73–95. Leuven: Peeters, 1997.
- Noga-Banai, Galit. *Sacred Stimulus: Jerusalem in the Visual Christianization of Rome*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.
- . “Visual Prototype versus Biblical Text: Moses Receiving the Law in Rome.” In *Sarcofagi tardoantichi, paleocristiani e altomedievali*, edited by F. Bisconti and H. Brandenburg, 173–83. Vatican City: Pontificio istituto di archeologia cristiana, 2004.
- Nordhagen, Per Jonas. “The Penetration of Byzantine Mosaic Technique into Italy in the Sixth Century.” In *III Colloquio internazionale sul mosaico antico: Ravenna, 6-10 settembre 1980*, edited by R. F. Campanati, 73–84. Ravenna: Girasole, 1983.
- Nouwen, Henri. *Behold the Beauty of the Lord: Praying with Icons*. Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria, 1987.
- Olin, Margaret. *The Nation without Art*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001.
- Orlandis, José, and Domingo Ramos-Lissón. *Die Synoden auf der Iberischen Halbinsel bis zum Einbruch des Islam (711)*. Paderborn: F. Schöningh, 1981.
- Ornan, Tallay. “The Throne and the Enthroned: On the Conceived Image of Yahweh in Iron II Jerusalem.” *Tel Aviv* 46, no. 2 (2019): 198–210.
- . *The Triumph of the Symbol: Pictorial Representation of Deities in Mesopotamia and the Biblical Image Ban*. Fribourg: Academic Press Fribourg; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 2005.
- Osborne, John. “The Roman Catacombs in the Middle Ages.” *Papers of the British School at Rome* 53 (1985): 278–328.
- Paffenroth, Kim. “Paulsen on Augustine: An Incorporeal or Nonanthropomorphic God?” *Harvard Theological Review* 86 (1993): 233–35.
- Paulsen, David. “Early Christian Belief in a Corporeal Deity: Origen and Augustine as Reluctant Witnesses.” *Harvard Theological Review* 83 (1990): 105–16.
- Pearce, Sarah, ed. *The Image and Its Prohibition in Jewish Antiquity*. Oxford: Journal of Jewish Studies, 2013.
- . “Philo of Alexandria on the Second Commandment.” In *The Image and Its Prohibition in Jewish Antiquity*, edited by Sarah Pearce, 49–76. Oxford: Journal of Jewish Studies, 2013.
- Peers, Glenn. “Imagination and Angelic Epiphany.” *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 21 (1997): 113–31.

- Pekáry, Thomas. *Das römische Kaiserbildnis in Staat, Kult und Gesellschaft*. Berlin: Mann, 1985.
- Pelletier, André, trans. *Philon d'Alexandrie: Legatio ad Caium*. Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1972.
- Pepin, Jean. "The Euhemerism of the Christian Authors." In *Roman and European Mythologies*, edited by Y. Bonnefoy, translated by W. Doniger, 176–81. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.
- Peppard, Michael. "Was the Presence of Christ in Statues? The Challenge of Divine Media for a Jewish Roman God." In *The Art of Empire: Christian Art in Its Imperial Context*, edited by L. M. Jefferson and R. M. Jensen, 225–70. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015.
- Pharr, C., trans. *The Theodosian Code*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952.
- Platt, Verity. *Facing the Gods: Epiphany and Representation in Graeco-Roman Art, Literature, and Religion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- Pohlkamp, Wilhelm. "Kaiser Konstantin, der heidnische und der christliche Kult in den Actus Silvestri." *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 18 (1984): 357–400.
- Price, Richard. "Icons before and during Iconoclasm." https://www.academia.edu/20430402/Icons_before_and_during_Iconoclasm
- Price, S. R. F. *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.
- Quasten, Johannes. *Patrology*. Vol. 2, *The Ante-Nicene Literature after Irenaeus*. Westminster, MD: Newman, 1964.
- Rasmussen, Mikael B. "Traditio legis?" *Cahiers archéologiques* 47 (1999): 5–37.
- Rebillard, Éric. "The Christian Mob and the Destruction of Pagan Statues: The Case of North Africa in the Age of Augustine." In *Transformations of Religious Practices in Late Antiquity*, 73–87. Aldershot: Variorum, 2013.
- . *Christians and Their Many Identities in Late Antiquity, North Africa, 200–450 ce*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012.
- . *The Early Martyr Narratives: Neither Authentic Accounts nor Forgeries*. College Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2021.
- Riggs, David. "The Continuity of Paganism between the Cities and the Countryside of Late Roman Africa." In *Urban Centers and Rural Contexts in Late Antiquity*, edited by T. S. Burns and J. W. Edie, 285–300. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2012.
- Rizzardi, Clementina. "L'arte dei Goti a Ravenna: Motivi ideologici, aspetti iconografici e formali nella decorazione musiva." *Corso di cultura sull'arte ravennate e bizantina* 36 (1989): 365–88.

- Robbins, Vernon, Walter Melion, and Roy Jeal, eds. *The Art of Visual Exegesis: Rhetoric, Texts, Images*. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2017.
- Roberts, Michael. *Poetry and the Cult of the Martyrs: The "Liber Peristephanon" of Prudentius*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994.
- Rodenwaldt, Gerhard. "Eine spätantike Kunstströmung in Rom." *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Römische Abteilung* 36-37 (1921-22): 58-110.
- Rorem, Paul. *Biblical and Liturgical Symbols within the Pseudo-Dionysian Synthesis*. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984.
- Roubekas, Nikolas. "Which Euhemerism Will You Use? Celsus on the Nature of Jesus." *Journal of Early Christian History* 2 (2012): 80-96.
- Rüpke, Jörg. *Religion of the Romans*. Translated and edited by R. Gordon. Malden, MA: Polity, 2007.
- . "Representation or Presence? Picturing the Divine in Ancient Rome." *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* 12 (2010): 181-96.
- Ságghy, Marianne. "Pope Damasus and the Beginnings of Roman Hagiography." In *Promoting the Saints: Cults and Their Contexts from Late Antiquity until the Early Modern Period*, edited by Ottó Gecser, József Laszlovszky, Balázs Nagy, Marcell Sebők, and Katalin Szende, 1-16. Budapest: Central European University Press, 2011.
- Salzman, Michele R. "Rethinking Pagan-Christian Violence." In *Violence in Late Antiquity: Perceptions and Practices*, edited by H.A. Drake, 265-85. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006.
- Sande, Siri. "The Icon and Its Origin in Graeco-Roman Portraiture." In *Aspects of Late Antiquity and Early Byzantium*, edited by L. Rydén, 75-84. Uppsala: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1993.
- . "Pagan Pinakes and Christian Icons: Continuity or Parallelism?" *Acta ad archeologiam et artium historiam pertinentia* 18 (2003): 81-100.
- Saradi-Mendelovici, Helen. "Christian Attitudes toward Pagan Monuments in Late Antiquity and Their Legacy in Later Byzantine Centuries." *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 44 (1990): 47-61.
- Satlow, Michael. "Beyond Influence: Toward a New Historiographic Paradigm." In *Jewish Literatures and Cultures: Context and Interpretation*, edited by A. Norich and Y.Z. Eliav, 37-54. Brown Judaic Studies 349. Providence, RI: Brown University Press, 2008.
- The SBL Handbook of Style*. 2nd ed. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014.

- Schäfer, Peter. *Judeophobia: Attitudes toward the Jews in the Ancient World*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998.
- Schaff, Philip, and Henry Wallace, eds. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*. 2nd ser. Vol. 4, *Athanasius: Select Works and Letters*. Vol. 14, *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*. New York: Cosimo Classics, 2007.
- Schapiro, Meyer. *Words, Script, and Pictures: Semiotics of Visual Language*. New York: George Braziller, 1996.
- Scheer, Tanja S. *Die Gottheit und ihr Bild: Untersuchungen zur Funktion griechischer Kultbilder in Religion and Politik*. Munich: C. H. Beck, 2000.
- Schmemmann, Alexander. *Introduction to Liturgical Theology*. Translated by Asheleigh E. Moorhouse. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1986.
- Schmidt, Brian. "The Aniconic Tradition: On Reading Images and Viewing Texts." In *The Triumph of Elohim: From Yahwisms to Judaisms*, edited by D. Edelman, 75–105. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996.
- Schmitt, Jean-Claude. "Les reliques et les images." In *Les reliques: Objets, cultes, symbols—Actes du colloque international de l'Université du Littoral-Côte d'Opale (Boulougne-sur-Mer), 4–6 septembre 1997*, edited by E. Bozóky and A.-M. Helvetius, 145–67. Turnhout: Brepols, 1999.
- Schumacher, Walter. *Hirt und "Guter Hirt": Studien zum Hirtenbild in der römischen Kunst vom zweiten bis zum Anfang des vierten Jahrhunderts unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Mosaiken in der Südhalle von Aquileja*. Freiburg: Herder, 1977.
- Schwartz, Daniel. "Viewing the Holy Utensils (P. Ox. V, 840)." *New Testament Studies* 32, no. 1 (1986): 153–57.
- Schwartz, Jacques. "Le fin du Sérapéum d'Alexandrie." In *Essays in Honor of C. Bradford Welles*, 97–111. American Studies in Papyrology 1. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966.
- Setton, Kenneth. *Christian Attitude towards the Emperor in the Fourth Century*. New York: AMS, 1967.
- Shaw, Brent. *Sacred Violence: African Christians and Sectarian Hatred in the Age of Augustine*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- Shaw, Gregory. *Theurgy and the Soul: The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus*. Kettering, OH: Angelico, 2014.
- Smith, Julia. "Portable Christianity: Relics in the Medieval West (c. 700–1200)." *Proceedings of the British Academy* 181 (2012): 143–67.
- Smith, Rowland. *Julian's Gods: Religion and Philosophy in the Thought and Action of Julian the Apostate*. London: Routledge, 1995.

- Snelders, Bas. "The *Traditio Legis* on Early Christian Sarcophagi." *Antiquité tardive* 13 (2005): 321-33.
- Snyder, Gregory. "'She Destroyed Multitudes': Marcellina's Group in Rome." In *Women and Knowledge in Early Christianity*, edited by Ulla Tervahauta, Ivan Miroshnikov, Outi Lehtipuu, and Ismo Dunderberg, 39-61. Leiden: Brill, 2017.
- Sode, Claudia, and Paul Speck. "Ikonoklasmos vor der Zeit? Der Brief des Eusebios von Kaisareia an Kaiserin Konstantia." *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 54 (2004): 113-34.
- Solovieva, Olga. "Epiphanius of Salamis between Church and State: New Perspectives on the Iconoclastic Fragments." *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum* 16 (2012): 344-67.
- Sörries, Reiner. *Die Bilder der Orthodoxen im Kampf gegen den Arianismus*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1983.
- Speck, Paul. "Γραφαῖς ἡ γλυφαῖς: On the Fragment of Hypatios of Ephesos on Images, with an Appendix on the *Dialogue with a Jew* by Leontios of Neapolis." Translated by Sarolta Takács. In Speck, *Understanding Byzantium: Studies in Byzantine Historical Sources*, edited by Takács, 50-83. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003.
- . "Wunderheilige und Bilder: Zur Frage des Beginns der Bilderverehrung." *Poikila byzantina* 3, varia 3 (1991): 163-247.
- Spier, Jeffrey. "Engraved Gems and Amulets." In *The Routledge Handbook of Early Christian Art*, edited by R. Jensen and M. Ellison, 141-49. London: Routledge, 2018.
- , ed. *Picturing the Bible: The Earliest Christian Art*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007.
- Spieser, Jean-Michel. "Invention du portrait du Christ." In *Le portrait: La représentation de l'individu*, Micrologus' Library 17, edited by Agostino Paravicini Bagliani, Spieser, and Jean Wirth, 57-76. Florence: SISMEL-Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2007.
- Spittler, Janet E. "Is Vienna Hist. Gr. 63, Fol. 51v-55v a 'Fragment'?" *Ancient Jew Review*, May 6, 2019, <https://www.ancientjewreview.com/read/2019/4/30/is-vienna-hist-gr-63-fol-51v-55v-a-fragment>.
- . "John, Acts of." In *Brill Encyclopedia of Early Christianity* (online), edited by David G. Hunter, Paul J.J. van Geest, and Bert Jan Lietaert Peerbolte, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2589-7993_EECO_SIM_00001801.
- Squire, Michael, ed. *Sight and the Ancient Senses*. London: Routledge, 2016.

- Ste. Croix, G. E. M. de. *Christian Persecution, Martyrdom, and Orthodoxy*. Edited by Michael Whitby and Joseph Streeter. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Steiner, Deborah Tarn. *Images in Mind: Statues in Archaic and Classical Greek Literature and Thought*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.
- Stern, Sacha. "Images in Late Antique Palestine: Jewish and Graeco-Roman Views." In *The Image and Its Prohibition in Jewish Antiquity*, edited by Sarah Pearce, 110–29. Oxford: Journal of Jewish Studies, 2013.
- Stewart, Columba. "Imageless Prayer and the Theological Vision of Evagrius Ponticus." *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 9, no. 2 (2001): 173–204.
- Stewart, Peter. "Destruction of Statues in Late Antiquity." In *Constructing Identities in Late Antiquity*, edited by R. Miles, 159–89. London: Routledge, 1999.
- . *Statues in Roman Society: Representation and Response*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Stirling, Lea. *The Learned Collector: Mythological Statuettes and Classical Taste in Late Antique Gaul*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005.
- Stock, Wiebke-Marie. "Theurgy and Aesthetics in Dionysios the Areopagite." In *Aesthetics and Theurgy in Byzantium*, edited by S. Mariev and Stock, 13–30. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013.
- Taft, Robert. "Is There Devotion to the Holy Eucharist in the Christian East?" *Worship* 80 (2006): 212–33.
- Talgam, Rina. *Mosaics of Faith: Floors of Pagans, Jews, Samaritans, Christians, and Muslims in the Holy Land*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014.
- Taylor, Joan. *Christians and the Holy Places: The Myth of Jewish-Christian Origins*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1993.
- Taylor, John H., trans. *St. Augustine: The Literal Meaning of Genesis*. Vol. 2. ACW 42. New York: Newman, 1982.
- Taylor, Lily Ross. "Aniconic Worship among the Early Romans." In *Classical Studies in Honor of John C. Rolfe*, edited by G. D. Hadzsits, 305–19. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1931.
- Terry, Ann, and Henry Maguire. *Dynamic Splendor: The Wall Mosaics in the Cathedral of Euphrasius at Poreč*. 2 vols. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007.
- Teske, Roland J., trans. *Saint Augustine: Letters 100–155*. The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century. Pt. 2, vol. 2. Edited by Boniface Ramsay. Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2002.

- , trans. *Saint Augustine: Letters 156–210*. The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century. Pt. 2, vol. 3. Edited by Boniface Ramsay. Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2004.
- Thomas, Gabrielle. “The Human Icon: Gregory of Nazianzus on Being an *Imago Dei*.” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 72 (2019): 166–81.
- Thomson, H.J., trans. *Prudentius*. Vol. 2. LCL 398. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953.
- Thulin, Oskar. “Die Christus-Statuette im Museo Nazionale Romano.” *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Römische Abteilung* 44 (1929): 201–59.
- Thuno, Eric. *Image and Relic: Mediating the Sacred in Early Medieval Rome*. *Analecta romana instituti danici, supplementa*. Rome: “L’Erma” di Bretschneider, 2002.
- Trout, Dennis E. *Paulinus of Nola: Life, Letters, and Poems*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.
- Uehlinger, Christoph. “Anthropomorphic Cult Statuary in Iron Age Palestine and the Search for Yahweh’s Cult Images.” In *The Image and the Book: Iconic Cults, Aniconism, and the Rise of Book Religion in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, edited by K. van der Toorn, 97–155. Leuven: Peeters, 1997.
- Urbano, Arthur. “Sizing Up the Philosopher’s Cloak: Christian Verbal and Visual Representations of the *Tribōn*.” In *Dressing Judeans and Christians in Antiquity*, edited by Kristi Upson-Saia, Carly Daniel-Hughes, and Alicia J. Batten, 175–94. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2014.
- Usener, Hermann, ed. *M. Annaei Lucani: Commenta Bernensia*. Scholia in Lucani Bellum Civile 1. Leipzig: Teubner, 1869.
- van der Toorn, K., ed. *The Image and the Book: Iconic Cults, Aniconism, and the Rise of Book Religion in Israel and the Ancient Near East*. Leuven: Peeters, 1997.
- van Ouwerkerk, Coenraad A.J. “‘Effigies Dei’ and the Religious Imagination: A Psychological Perspective.” In *Effigies Dei: Essays on the History of Religions*, edited by Dirk van der Plas, 156–70. Leiden: Brill, 1987.
- van Tongeren, Louis. *Exaltation of the Cross: Toward the Origins of the Feast of the Cross and the Meaning of the Cross in Early Medieval Liturgy*. Leuven: Peeters, 2000.
- Varner, Eric. *Mutilation and Transformation: “Damnatio Memoriae” and Roman Imperial Portraiture*. *Monumenta graeca et romana* 10. Leiden: Brill, 2004.

- Versnel, H. S. "What Did Ancient Man See When He Saw a God? Some Reflections on Greco-Roman Epiphany." In *Effigies Dei: Essays on the History of Religions*, edited by Dirk van der Plas, 42-55. Leiden: Brill, 1987.
- Vikan, Gary. "Art, Medicine, and Magic." *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 38 (1984): 67-74.
- . *Early Byzantine Pilgrimage Art*. Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Publications, 1982.
- Vinzent, Markus. "Earliest 'Christian' Art Is Jewish Art." In *Jewish Art in Its Late Antique Context*, edited by Uzi Leibner and Catherine Hezser, 263-77. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016.
- von Ehrenkrook, Jason. *Sculpting Idolatry in Flavian Rome: (An)Iconic Rhetoric in the Writings of Flavius Josephus*. Atlanta: SBL, 2011.
- von Schönborn, Christoph. *God's Human Face: The Christ-Icon*. Translated by L. Krauth. San Francisco: Ignatius, 1994.
- Walker, Peter W. L. *Holy City, Holy Places? Christian Attitudes to Jerusalem and the Holy Places in the Fourth Century*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1990.
- Walker, Susan. *Greek and Roman Portraits*. London: British Museum Press, 1995.
- Wallace-Hadrill, Andrew. *Houses and Society in Pompeii and Herculaneum*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994.
- Walsh, P. G., trans. *Letters of St. Paulinus of Nola*. Vol. 2. New York: Newman, 1967.
- , trans. *The Poems of Paulinus of Nola*. ACW 40. New York: Newman, 1975.
- Ward, Benedicta. *Harlots of the Desert: A Study of Repentance in Early Monastic Sources*. Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian, 1987.
- Wasserman, Emma. "'An Idol Is Nothing in the World' (1 Cor 8:4): The Metaphysical Contradictions of 1 Corinthians 8:1-11:1 in the Context of Jewish Idolatry Polemics." In *Portraits of Jesus: Studies in Christology*, edited by S. Myers, 201-27. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012.
- Waszink, J. H., and J. G. M. Winden, eds. and trans. *Tertullianus: De idololatria*. Leiden: Brill, 1987.
- Williamson, H. G. M. "Was There an Image of the Deity in the First Temple?" In *The Image and Its Prohibition in Jewish Antiquity*, edited by Sarah Pearce, 28-48. Oxford: Journal of Jewish Studies, 2013.
- Wilpert, Giuseppe. "Le pitture della 'confessio' sotto la basilica dei SS. Giovanni e Paulo." In *Scritti in onore di Bartolomeo Nogara raccolti in occasione del suo LXX anno*, 517-22. Vatican City: Tipografia del Senato, 1937.

- . *Roma sotterranea: Le pitture della catacombe romane*. Rome: Desclée, Lefebvre, 1903.
- Wilson, Brittany. *The Embodied God: Seeing the Divine in Luke-Acts and the Early Church*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021.
- Wilson, John F. *Caesarea Philippi: Baniyas, the Lost City of Pan*. London: I. B. Tauris: 2004.
- . "The 'Statue of Christ' at Baniyas: A Saga of Pagan-Christian Confrontation in 4th Century Syro-Palestine." *ARAM Periodical* 18-19 (2006): 1-11.
- Wiśniewski, Robert. *The Beginnings of the Cult of Relics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019.
- . "Pagan Temples, Christians, and Demons in the Late Antique East and West." *Sacris erudi* 54 (2016): 111-28.
- Wood, Simon P., trans. *Clement of Alexandria: Christ the Educator*. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1954.
- Wolf, Gerhard. "From Mandylion to Veronica: Picturing the 'Disembodied' Face and Disseminating the True Image of Christ in the Latin West." In *The Holy Face and the Paradox of Representation*, edited by H. Kessler and Wolf, 168-69. Bologna: Nuova Alfa, 1998.
- Wright, Wilmer Cave, trans. *The Works of the Emperor Julian*. 3 vols. LCL. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1913.
- Zanker, Paul. *The Mask of Socrates: The Image of the Intellectual in Antiquity*. Translated by A. Shapiro. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.
- Zeitlin, Solomon. "Did Agrippa Write a Letter to Gaius Caligula?" *Jewish Quarterly Review* 56 (1965): 22-31.
- Zimmerman, Norbert. "Catacomb Painting and the Rise of Christian Iconography." In *The Routledge Handbook of Early Christian Art*, edited by R. Jensen and M. Ellison, 21-38. London: Routledge, 2018.
- . "The Healing Christ in Early Christian Funeral Art: The Example of the Frescoes at Domitilla Catacomb/Rome." In *Miracles Revisited: New Testament Miracle Stories and Their Concepts of Reality*, edited by S. Alkier and A. Weissenrieder, 251-74. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013.

GENERAL INDEX

Abgar, King of Edessa, [126](#), [127fig](#), [134](#), [198n6](#)
Abraham, [39](#), [45](#), [46](#), [71](#), [78](#), [79](#), [80fig.](#), [92](#); hospitality of, [57-62](#), [61fig.](#), [62fig.](#), [63fig.](#), [71](#), [73](#)
Abun, Rabbi, [34](#)
acheiropoieta (miraculous images), [125-28](#), [134](#)
Adam and Eve, [56](#), [62](#), [64fig.](#), [78](#), [79](#), [81](#), [182n37](#)
Agnes, Saint, [86](#), [97fig.](#)
Agrippa, [33](#), [176n26](#)
altar, [4](#), [5](#), [7](#), [8](#), [16](#), [26](#), [30](#), [32](#), [89](#), [91](#), [133](#), [134](#), [151](#), [155](#), [161-62](#), [164](#)
aniconic/ism, [1-2](#), [20](#), [23](#), [29-36](#), [43-77](#), [51-52](#), [71](#), [74](#), [183n4](#)
anthropomorphic/ism, [27](#), [32](#), [35-38](#), [40](#), [44](#), [49](#), [52](#), [56-57](#), [62](#), [71](#), [181n8](#)
anthropomorphite controversy, [41-43](#), [179n78](#), [179n83](#)
Apollo, [91](#), [119](#), [129-30](#), [197n53](#)
Arianism, [67](#), [84](#), [120](#), [122](#), [139](#), [202n68](#)
Ark of the Covenant, [7](#), [44](#)
Artemis, [11](#)
Asclepius, [38](#), [145](#), [160](#)
Ashbrook, Susan Harvey, [149](#)
Astarte, [10](#)

Baal, [10](#), [21](#), [162](#)
 baptism, [76](#), [112](#), [135](#), [136](#), [147](#), [157](#), [165](#); of Christ, [46](#), [47fig.](#), [78](#)
 Barlaam, Saint, [98](#)
 beard, [38](#), [60](#), [62](#), [86](#), [96](#), [110](#), [114](#), [116-20](#), [122](#), [125](#), [128](#), [163](#), [196n52](#),
[197n63](#),
 Belting, Hans, [2](#)
 Bes, [15](#)
 Beth Alpha (Synagogue), [45](#), [46fig.](#)
 Bitton-Ashkelony, Brouria, [150](#)
 bronze serpent, [8-9](#)
 burning bush, [52](#), [57-58](#), [60](#)

 Cain and Abel, [62](#), [64fig.](#), [81](#)
 Calvin, John, [xvii](#), [1-2](#), [73](#), [146](#), [169n2](#), [169n1](#), [203n12](#)
 Carpocratians, [92](#), [94](#), [188n4](#)
 Castor and Pollux, [19fig.](#)
 Chadwick, Henry, [2](#), [74](#)
 cherubim, [7](#), [9](#), [32](#)
 Christ: depictions of, [47fig.](#), [48fig.](#), [69fig.](#), [76](#), [80fig.](#), [81-87](#), [87fig.](#), [88fig.](#), [90-98](#), [102-4](#), [103fig.](#), [106fig.](#), [106-7](#), [108-13](#), [115-24](#), [117fig.](#), [188fig.](#), [119fig.](#),
[120fig.](#), [121fig.](#), [123fig.](#), [125-29](#), [127fig.](#), [133fig.](#), [131-35](#), [137fig.](#), [142](#), [156-58](#), [165](#), [188n11](#); incarnation of, [xviii](#), [52](#), [58](#), [60](#), [65-67](#), [71](#), [78](#), [93](#), [95](#), [110](#),
[116](#), [147-48](#), [156-75](#), [165](#); miracles of, [67](#), [68fig.](#), [72](#), [78-79](#), [83](#), [152](#); second coming of, [58](#), [115](#)
 Claudius, [81](#), [106](#)
 consecration/consecratory rites, [4](#), [7-9](#), [21-23](#), [31](#), [143](#), [172n57](#),
 Constantia, [93](#)
 Constantine I, [2](#), [83-85](#), [112](#), [149-51](#), [159-61](#)
 Cox-Miller, Patricia, [147](#)
 Cronus, [38](#)
 cross of Christ, [8-9](#), [46-51](#), [49fig.](#), [50fig.](#), [51fig.](#), [66](#), [96](#), [101](#), [113](#), [118](#), [121fig.](#),
[129-30](#), [134](#), [152](#), [164fig.](#), [165](#), [180n95](#), [192n49](#), [208n38](#)
 Cybele, [14fig.](#), [16fig.](#)

 Dagon, [44](#)
 Daniel, [10](#), [56](#), [71](#), [75](#), [78](#), [79](#), [83](#), [85](#)
 Decalogue, [2](#), [5](#), [32](#), [170n20](#), [176n20](#)
 Decius, [82](#)

demons, [4-7](#), [9](#), [11](#), [22](#), [24](#), [26-27](#), [29](#), [98](#), [134](#), [140](#), [143](#), [145](#), [157](#), [162](#), [165](#), [171n24](#),
Diocletian, [82](#), [86](#)
dove, [49-51](#), [51fig.](#), [75-76](#), [185n16](#)
Dura-Europos, [1](#), [79](#)
Dura-Europos Synagogue, [34](#), [44](#), [45fig.](#),

ekphrasis, [99](#), [192n45](#)
Elvira, Council of, [93](#), [160](#), [206n5](#)
Emmaus, [113](#), [120](#)
emperor (images of), [81-82](#), [84](#), [136-40](#), [138fig.](#), [159-60](#), [176n25](#), [202n67](#)
Endymion, [75](#)
Epicureans, [36](#)
Euhemerism, [38-41](#), [170n16](#), [178nn58,61](#)
Euphemia, Saint, [98](#)

Finney, Paul Corby, [3](#)

Gaius Caligula, [33](#), [176n26](#)
Germanos of Constantinople, [105](#)
Gibbon, Edward, [2](#), [73](#)
Giovanni and Paolo (Basilica), [101fig.](#), [130](#)
Gnostics, [2](#), [54](#), [58-59](#), [91-92](#), [148](#)
golden calf, [10](#)
Good Shepherd, [69](#), [75-77](#), [77fig.](#), [82-83](#), [85-86](#)

Helios, [34](#), [44](#)
Herakles, [38](#), [75](#), [163](#), [164fig.](#)
Hermes, [75](#), [119](#)
Herod, [33](#)
Holy Face of Manoppello, [128](#)
Holy Sepulcher, [129](#), [150](#)
Hosios David (Moni Latomou), Church/Monastery, [68](#), [69fig.](#), [122](#)
iconoclasm, [94-96](#), [147](#), [157](#)

imago Dei, [54-55](#)
incorporeality, [27](#), [30](#), [39-44](#), [54](#), [58](#), [65-66](#), [70](#), [109](#), [116](#), [140](#), [147](#)
Isaac, binding of, [44-46](#), [46fig.](#), [62fig.](#), [78](#), [79](#), [80fig.](#)
Isis, [14-15](#), [17fig.](#), [109fig.](#)

Jacob, [39-40](#), [57-58](#), [71](#)

Jesus. *See* Christ

Jonah, [75-79](#), [77fig.](#), [82](#), [83fig.](#)

Julian (the Apostate), [26](#), [51](#), [84](#), [130](#), [138](#), [140](#), [155](#), [161](#), [186n43](#)

Juno, [17](#), [37](#)

Jupiter, [15fig.](#), [17](#), [19fig.](#), [38](#), [110](#), [118-19](#), [197n54](#)

Kamouliana, image of, [128](#), [134](#)

Kitzinger, Ernst, [2](#), [74-75](#), [88](#)

Klauser, Theodor, [2](#), [145](#)

lamb, [49fig.](#), [49-51](#), [51fig.](#), [56-57](#), [62fig.](#), [76](#), [84](#), [87](#), [88fig.](#)

Lucilla, [129](#), [134](#), [199n22](#)

Lycomedes, [91](#), [93](#), [102](#)

malevolent beings. *See* demons

Mamre. *See* Abraham, hospitality of

Mandylion, [134](#)

manus Dei, [44-46](#), [45fig.](#), [46fig.](#), [47fig.](#), [48fig.](#), [49fig.](#), [50fig.](#), [51fig.](#), [62](#), [72](#)

Marcion, [58](#)

Mars, [12fig.](#), [15-16](#), [18fig.](#), [160](#)

martyrs, [47](#), [82](#), [86-87](#), [88fig.](#), [97-102](#), [100fig.](#), [101fig.](#), [104](#), [107](#), [129-30](#), [132-33](#), [136](#), [139](#), [144-47](#), [150](#), [159-60](#), [163-64](#)

Mary Magdalene, [113](#)

Mary of Egypt, Saint, [129](#)

Mary, Virgin, [49](#), [85](#), [90](#), [103-4](#), [106fig.](#), [109-10](#), [129](#), [131-32](#), [133fig.](#), [134](#)

Meletius, Saint, [96-97](#)

menorah, [34](#)

Mercury, [13](#)

mercy seat, [32](#)

Minerva, [17](#)

modalism, [60](#)

Mosaic Law, [2](#)

Moses, [xvii](#), [7-9](#), [23](#), [30](#), [40](#), [46](#), [52](#), [53](#), [56-59](#), [65](#), [75](#), [78](#), [117-18](#), [156](#), [182n29](#)

Murray, Sister Mary Charles, [3](#)

Nebuchadnezzar, [10](#), [21](#), [80](#), [138](#), [160](#)

Neoplatonism, [xviii](#), [25](#), [86](#), [144](#), [148](#), [153-57](#)

Nicaea, Second Council of, [95-96](#), [108](#), [188n2](#), [202n67](#)

Noah, [76](#), [78-80](#), [80fig.](#)

Novatian, [59](#), [182n28](#)

Numa, [30-31](#)

numina, [26](#)

orans, [76](#)

Origenist controversy, [42](#), [179n83](#)

Orpheus, [75](#), [92](#)

Pammachius, [130-31](#)

Paneas, statue, [83](#), [85](#), [90](#), [93-94](#), [128](#)

Paul, Saint and Apostle, [7](#), [11](#), [37](#), [49fig.](#), [78](#), [84](#), [86fig.](#), [86-87](#), [88fig.](#), [93-96](#), [99-100](#), [100fig.](#), [103fig.](#), [104](#), [110-12](#), [116](#), [117fig.](#), [118](#), [120fig.](#), [122](#), [123fig.](#), [130](#), [148](#), [196n52](#)

Peter, Saint, [46](#), [49fig.](#), [78](#), [84](#), [86fig.](#), [87](#), [88fig.](#), [93](#), [95-96](#), [99-100](#), [103fig.](#), [104](#), [110](#), [112](#), [114-18](#), [117fig.](#), [118fig.](#), [120fig.](#), [122](#), [123fig.](#), [131](#), [196n52](#)

Petronilla, Saint, [131fig.](#)

Pheidias, [36](#)

pilgrimage, [129-30](#), [149-50](#)

pillar of cloud, [57](#), [60](#)

Platonism, [6](#), [23-24](#), [90](#), [113](#), [143-44](#)

Pompey, [34](#)

Pontius Pilate, [79](#), [fig.](#), [92](#), [120fig.](#), [137fig.](#)

pre-Socratics, [37-38](#)

Pythagoreans, [23](#), [30](#)

realism, [15](#)

relics, cult of, [xviii](#), [51](#), [91](#), [100-101](#), [125-26](#), [129-35](#), [144-45](#), [147-49](#), [157](#), [199n18](#)

Rublev, Andrei, [62](#), [63fig.](#)

Saint Apollinare in Classe (Basilica), [46](#), [47](#), [49fig.](#)

San Vitale (Basilica), [62fig.](#), [86](#), [103fig.](#), [122](#)

Sant'Apollinare Nuovo (Basilica), [120](#), [121fig.](#)

Santa Costanza (Mausoleum), [116-17](#), [117fig.](#), [118fig.](#), [120](#)

Serenus of Marseilles, [105-6](#)

Severus Alexander, [92](#)

Shroud of Turin, [126](#)

signum, [20](#)

simulacrum, [20](#)

Smilis, [30](#)

Sol, [27](#)
Solomon, [32](#)
statua, [20](#)
statue/statuary, [36](#), [84](#),
Stoicism, [23](#), [36](#), [39](#), [153](#)
Susannah, [78](#)

talisman, [13](#), [15fig.](#)
Telecles, [30](#)
Temple, Jerusalem, [32-34](#)
Ten Commandments. *See* Decalogue
tetragrammaton, [44](#)
Thales of Miletus, [23](#)
Theodore, Saint, [97](#), [123fig.](#), [130](#)
Theodoric, King, [120](#)
Theodorus, [26](#), [30](#)
Theophilus of Alexandria, [41-43](#), [162](#), [179n82](#)
Theophilus of Antioch, [58](#), [69-70](#)
Three Hebrew Youths, [10](#), [78](#), [80fig.](#), [82](#), [138](#), [160](#)
Torah (shrine and scrolls), [44](#)
traditio clavium, [117](#), [118fig.](#)
traditio legis, [118fig.](#), [120fig.](#)
Transfiguration, [46](#), [65](#), [113-17](#)
Trinity, Holy, [64fig.](#), [49-50](#), [57-60](#), [61fig.](#), [62fig.](#), [64fig.](#), [65](#), [71](#), [81](#), [104](#), [140](#)

Uranus, [38](#)

Veneranda, [131fig.](#)
Venus, [15](#), [18fig.](#)
Veronica's veil, [126](#), [128](#)
Victor, Saint, [102fig.](#)
Via Latina catacomb, [60](#), [75](#)
votive offering, [13-14](#), [16fig.](#), [81](#), [84](#), [87](#), [194n6](#)
Vulcan, [37](#)

Xenophon, [23](#), [30](#)

Yohanan, Rabbi, [34](#)

Zeus, [33](#), [36](#), [38-39](#), [51](#), [119](#)

Zeus Serapis, [13fig.](#)

zodiac, [34](#), [44](#)

zoomorphic, [32](#), [35](#)

OceanofPDF.com

INDEX OF SOURCES

BIBLICAL REFERENCES

Gen 1:26-27, [40-41](#), [53-54](#)

Gen 3:8-9, [56](#)

Gen 17:1, [53](#)

Gen 18:1, [57](#), [60](#)

Gen 32:30, [57](#)

Exod 3:4, [52](#)

Exod 20:4-5, [xvi](#), [1](#), [5](#), [7-10](#), [20](#), [32](#), [74](#)

Exod 24:10-22, [57](#)

Exod 31:18, [56](#)

Exodus 32:1-25, [10](#)

Exod 33:11, [57](#)

Exod 33:17-23, [xvii](#), [57](#)

Lev 26:30, [21](#)

Num 12:8, [57](#)

Num 21:6-9, [8](#)

Deut 29:17, [21](#)

Deut 4:12-19, [21](#), [53](#)

Deut 5:8, [1](#), [9](#)

Deut 7:25, [21](#)

Deut 32:21, [21](#)

Judg 2:16-25, [10](#)

Judg 17:4-5, [21](#)

1 Sam 5:1-5, [44](#)

1 Sam 19:13, [21](#)

1 Kgs 6:23-27, [32](#)

1 Kgs 7:25-29, [32](#)

1 Kgs 18, [162](#)

1 Kgs 23:1-24, [32](#)

2 Kgs 3:2, [21](#)

2 Kgs 19:16, [56](#)

Neh 9:18, [10](#)

Ps 10:11, [56](#)

Ps 13:1, [56](#)

Ps 27:8-9, [56](#)

Ps 31:15, [56](#)

Ps 31:5, [56](#)

Ps 44:3, [56](#)

Ps 97:7, [21](#)

Ps 106:19-20, [10](#)

Ps 115:4-8, [8-9](#)

Ps 135:15-18, [9](#)

Ps 135:18, [8](#)

Wis 14:12-31, [10](#)

Isa 25:9, [68](#)

Isa 37:19, [9](#)

Isa 41:28, [21](#)

Isa 42:17, [9](#)

Isa 44:8-9, [8](#)

Isa 44:9-20, [9](#), [21](#)

Isa 49:16, [56](#)

Isa 53:2, [115](#)

Jer 10:3-5, [9](#)

Jer 16:20, [9](#)

Bar 6, [10](#)

Ezek 1:26-28, [56](#)

Ezek 8:2-4, [45](#), [56](#)

Ezek 37:1-6, [45](#)

Ezek 37:23, [21](#)

Dan 3, [10](#), [21](#)

Dan 6, [10](#)

Dan 7:9, [56](#)

Hab 2:18-19, [9](#)

Matt 3:17, [46](#)

Matt 5:8, [69](#)

Matt 11:27, [59](#), [65](#)

Matt 17:1-9, [114](#)

Mk 1:11, [46](#)

Mk 9:2-23, [114](#)

Mk 16:12, [113](#)

Lk 3:21, [46](#)

Lk 9:28-36, [114](#)

Lk 24:13-43, [113](#)

Jn 1:18, [29](#), [40](#), [53](#), [59](#), [65](#)

Jn 10:11, [76](#)

Jn 4:23, [75](#)

Jn 7:39, [122](#)

Jn 13:31-32, [122](#)

Jn 17:1, [122](#)

Jn 20:15-16, [113](#)

Jn 21:4, [113](#)

Jn 24:26, [122](#)

Acts 7:39-43, [10](#), [122](#)

Acts 7:41, [21](#)

Acts 15:20, [21](#)

Acts 17:29, [11](#)

Acts 19:26-27, [11](#)

Rom 1:18-25, [11](#)

Rom 1:20, [29](#), [66](#), [148](#)

Rom 1:21, [7](#)

Rom 1:23, [7](#), [21](#)

Rom 1:26, [7](#), [41](#)

Rom 2:22, [21](#)

Rom 8:29, [21](#)

1 Cor 4:16, [55](#)

1 Cor 5:10-11, [11](#)

1 Cor 8:4-6, [11](#), [21](#)

1 Cor 8:7, [21](#)

1 Cor 10:14, [11](#)

1 Cor 10:19, [21](#)

1 Cor 10:20-21, [11](#)

1 Cor 10:7, [10](#)

1 Cor 11:7, [21](#), [42](#)

1 Cor 12:2, [21](#)

1 Cor 13:12, [70](#)

1 Cor 15:44, [70](#)

2 Cor 4:6, [65](#)

2 Cor 6:16, [11](#), [21](#)

Gal 5:20, [11](#)

Phil 2:7, [60](#), [94](#)

Col 1:15, [21](#), [40](#), [53-54](#), [65](#)

1 Thess 1:9, [21](#)

1 Tim 1:17, [53](#)

1 Tim 6:16, [53](#)

Heb 1:3, [65](#)

Heb 11:27, [65](#)

1 Pet 4:3, [11](#)

1 Jn 3:2, [58](#), [69](#)

1 Jn 5:21, [1](#), [11](#), [21](#)

Rev 1:12, [56](#)

Rev 1:17-20, [21](#)

Rev 4:3-5:1, [56](#), [68](#)

Rev 5:6-14, [56](#)

Rev 9:20, [21](#)

ANCIENT AUTHORS AND WORKS

Acts of Andrew and Matthias, [114](#)

Acts of Apollonius, [185n31](#)

Acts of Cyprian, [199n18](#)

Acts of Dasius, [185n33](#)

Acts of John, [91-92](#), [114](#), [133](#), [188n3](#), [195n30](#)

Acts of Mar Mari, [127](#), [198n8](#)

Acts of Peter, [78](#), [114](#), [195n29](#)

Acts of Pionius [185n32](#), [206n4](#)

Acts of Saint Sylvester, [112](#)

Acts of Thaddeus, [126](#)

Ambrose, [130](#), [138](#)

Epistle 77, [199n24](#)

Exposition on the Psalms 118, [202n60](#)

Apocryphon of John, [114](#)

Apostolic Constitutions, [201n47](#)

Apuleius, [13](#)

Apology, [172n53](#), [200n36](#)

Aristides of Athens, [38](#)

Apology, [178n57](#)

Arnobius, [25-26](#), [31](#), [38-39](#)

Adversus Nationes, [178nn55,58,62](#), [181n98](#), [194n10](#)

Asterius of Amasea, [98](#), [100](#), [107](#)

Athanasius of Alexandria, [65-67](#), [139](#), [148](#)

Contra Arianos, [202n67](#)
Contra Gentes, [183n44](#)
Life of Antony, [208n38](#)
On the Incarnation, [66](#), [148](#)
 Athenagoras of Athens, [6-7](#), [9](#), [29-31](#), [143](#)
Embassy for the Christians, [170n16](#), [171nn22,23,24](#), [174nn77,82](#), [2](#),
[178n58](#), [203n4](#)
 Augustine, [17](#), [26](#), [31](#), [36](#), [40-42](#), [52](#), [55-56](#), [60](#), [65](#), [67](#), [70](#), [100](#), [102-4](#), [110](#),
[123](#), [134](#), [148](#), [151-53](#), [156](#), [160](#), [163-64](#)
Ad Simplicianum, [204n39](#)
Against Julian, [171n33](#)
City of God, [31](#), [70](#), [153](#)
Confessions, [41](#), [56](#), [152](#), [204n38](#)
De diversis questionibus
De moribus ecclesiae catholicae
Epistle 16, [206n6](#)
Epistle 17, [206n6](#)
Epistle 50, [207n30](#)
Epistle 92, [183n53](#)
Epistle 102, [171n23](#)
Epistle 120, [179n74](#)
Epistle 147, [179n72](#), [182nn32,38,40](#), [183nn54,58](#)
Epistle 185, [206n7](#)
Exposition on the Psalms, [171n23](#)
The Harmony of the Gospels, [102](#)
Homilies on the Gospel of John, [67](#)
Literal Meaning of Genesis, The, [204nn36,37](#)
On the Trinity, [103](#), [152](#)
Sermon 23B, [174n93](#)
Sermon 24, [206nn28,29](#)
Sermon 198, [174n89](#)
Sermon 273, [206n3](#)
Sermon 277, [204n34](#)
Sermon 316, [192n47](#)
 Basil of Caesarea, [67](#), [90](#), [98](#), [100](#), [108](#), [111-2](#), [125](#), [138-39](#), [156](#)
Epistle 2, [194nn14,22](#)
Epistle 38, [205n56](#)

Homily 19, [90](#), [191n34](#)
Homily 24, [202n68](#)
On the Holy Spirit, [183nn46,48](#), [202n69](#)
On Isaiah, [202n59](#)
Bede, *Homilies*, [203n12](#)

Cassius Dio, [33](#)
History, [176n32](#)
Celsus, [7](#), [24](#), [38](#), [40](#), [54-56](#), [115](#)
Cicero, [3](#), [36](#), [38](#), [92](#)
On the Nature of the Gods, [3](#), [36](#)
Cleanthes, [23](#), [30](#)
Clement of Alexandria, [2](#), [5-6](#), [8](#), [30](#), [37](#), [76](#), [115](#)
Christ the Teacher, [76](#)
Exhortation to the Greeks, [6](#), [23](#)
Protrepticus, [171nn25,26](#), [174n80](#), [178n58](#)
The Stromata, [7](#), [23](#), [37](#)
Cyprian of Carthage, [38](#), [99](#)
Cyril of Alexandria, [73](#), [79](#)
Against Julian, [51](#)
Epistle 41, [73](#)
Cyril of Jerusalem, [135](#), [165](#)
Mystagogical Catechesis, [201nn49,50,51](#), [208n40](#)
Cyril of Scythopolis, [129](#)
Life of Cyriacus, [199n16](#)

Dio Cassius, [81](#). *See also* Cassius Dio
Dio Chrysostom, [36-37](#), [118](#)
Olympic Discourse, [110](#)
Orations, [194n7](#), [196n51](#)
Dionysius (Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite), [156-57](#)
Divine Names, [205n58](#)
Ecclesiastical Hierarchy, [205n59](#)
Mystical Theology, [205n57](#)
Doctrina Addai, [126](#)

Egeria, [134](#)
Travels of Egeria, [200n33](#)
Epiphanius of Salamis, [92](#), [94-96](#), [103](#), [105](#), [110](#)

Epistle 51 (trans. Jerome), [94-95](#)
Letter to the Emperor Theodosius, [94](#)
Pan., [188n6](#)
A Treatise Against Those Who, Following an Idolatrous Practice, Make Images with the Intention of Reproducing the Likeness of Christ, the Mother of God, the Angels, and the Prophets, [94](#)
Will, [94](#)
Euhemerus of Messene, [38](#)
Hiera anagrahe (Sacra historia), [178n58](#)
Eunomius of Cyzicus, [67](#)
Euripides, [30](#)
Eusebius of Caesarea, [25](#), [54](#), [59-60](#), [82-84](#), [93-94](#), [103](#), [105](#), [113](#), [116](#), [124](#), [128](#), [160-61](#)
Church History, [83](#)
Commentary on Isaiah, [182n30](#)
Dogmatic Letter, [94](#)
Letter to Constantia, [93](#), [95](#), [103](#), [106](#), [113](#), [124](#)
Life of Constantine, [82](#), [150](#), [160](#)
Preparation for the Gospel, [25](#)
Proof of the Gospels, [60](#)
Evagrius Ponticus, [42-43](#), [126](#)
Chapters on Prayer, [42](#)
Ecclesiastical History, [198n5](#)
Gregory of Nazianzus, [67](#), [84](#), [128](#), [138](#)
Against Julian, [202n61](#)
Oration 18, [187n45](#)
On Virtue, [128](#)
Gregory of Nyssa, [67](#), [90](#), [97](#), [100](#), [108](#), [130](#)
Against Eunomius, [183n46](#)
Funeral Oration on Melitius, [191n31](#)
On the Making of Man, [67](#)
In Praise of Theodore, [90](#), [130](#)
Gregory of Tours, [84](#), [128](#)
The Glory of the Martyrs, [128](#)
Gregory the Great, [105](#), [146](#)
Epistle 4, [200n39](#)
Epistle 9, [192n59](#),

Epistle 11, [193n60](#), [203n11](#)

Heraclitus, [24](#)

Herodotus, [38](#)

Hippolytus, [82](#), [92](#), [99](#)

On Christ and Antichrist, [180n90](#)

Refutation of All Heresies, [188n5](#)

Historia Augusta, [92](#), [137](#)

Hypatius of Ephesus, [105](#)

Iamblichus, [154-55](#)

On the Mysteries, [205nn48,49,50,51,52,53](#)

Irenaeus of Lyons, [37](#), [54](#), [58](#), [91](#), [133](#)

Against Heresies, [91](#)

Jacobus de Voragine, [126](#)

Golden Legend, [126](#)

Jerome, [94-95](#), [134](#), [138](#), [145](#), [147](#)

Against Vigilantius, [147](#)

Commentary on Daniel, [202n62](#)

Epistle 46, [200n34](#)

Epistle 51, [95](#)

Epistle 108, [200n35](#)

Jerusalem Talmud, [34](#)

John Cassian, [41](#)

Conferences, [41](#)

John Chrysostom, [42](#), [96](#), [108](#), [110-11](#), [116](#), [130](#), [145](#)

Commentary on the Psalms, [195n41](#)

Homily on the Acts of the Apostles, [194n13](#)

Homily in Praise of Melitius, [191n30](#)

Homily on Romans, [194n12](#)

Homilies on the Statues, [202n59](#)

On the Holy Martyr Babylas, [199n23](#)

John Malalas, [84](#)

Chronicle, [186n42](#)

Parastaseis, [186n43](#)

John of Damascus, [95](#), [105](#), [124](#), [147](#)

An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith, [198n10](#)

Oration on the Nativity of the Holy Theotokos Mary, [190n22](#), [198n10](#),
[200n37](#), [202nn59,69](#), [204n19](#)

Three Treatises on Divine Images, [197n56](#)

John of Ephesus, [129](#)

Ecclesiastical History, [129](#)

John of Thessalonica, [108](#), [110](#)

Josephus, Flavius, [32-33](#)

Ad Apion, [176n27](#)

Antiquities of the Jews, [176nn22,23,24,25,26](#)

The Jewish War, [176nn23,24,25](#)

Julian (the Apostate), [26](#), [51](#), [84](#), [130](#), [138](#), [140](#), [155](#), [161](#)

Against the Galileans, [51](#)

Fragment of a Letter to a Priest, [202n70](#)

Justin Martyr, [5](#), [23](#), [39](#), [57-58](#), [115](#)

First Apology, [170nn15,21](#), [180n90](#), [182n20](#), [186n35](#)

Dialogue with Trypho, [179nn66,67](#), [182nn21,22](#)

Lactantius

Divine Institutes, [178n58](#), [208n39](#)

Libanius, [51](#), [161](#)

Orations, [180n96](#), [202n59](#), [206nn16,17](#)

Liber Pontificalis, [84](#)

Life of Aphou, [42](#)

Livy, [33](#)

Martyrdom of Polycarp, [199n18](#)

Martyrdom of Gallicanus, Iohannes, and Paulus, [199n28](#)

Maximus of Tyre, [24](#), [37](#)

Dissertations, [174n85](#), [178n47](#)

Menander, [23](#)

Minucius Felix, [3](#), [5](#), [7-9](#), [23](#), [38](#), [54](#)

Octavius, [3-6](#), [9](#), [22-23](#), [29](#), [37-38](#), [48](#), [110](#)

Miracles of Saint Artemios, [195n28](#)

Miracles of Saint Demetrios, [112-13](#)

Nicephorus, [95](#), [124](#)

Antirrhetica adversus Epiphanidem, [95](#)

Optatus of Milevis, [129](#)

Contra Parmenian, [199n20](#)

Origen of Alexandria, [5](#), [7-9](#), [24-25](#), [31](#), [38-40](#), [42-43](#), [54-56](#), [59](#), [65](#), [115](#)

Against Celsus, [115](#)

Commentary on John, [179n68](#)

Commentary on Romans, [181n3](#)

De principiis, [179n68](#), [181nn3,4](#), [182nn26,39](#)

Homilies on Exodus, [171n41](#)

Homilies on Genesis, [181nn3,4](#), [182n27](#)

Palladas

Greek Anthology, [208n34](#)

Palladius of Helenopolis, [42](#)

Dialogue on the Life of Saint John Chrysostom, [179n78](#)

Parastaseis syntomoi chronikai, [84](#)

Passion of the Holy Martyr Fructus, [206n3](#)

Paulinus of Nola, [46](#), [50](#), [104-6](#), [112](#)

Carmen 27, [192n56](#)

Epistle 32, [180nn93,94](#), [192n57](#), [194n21](#)

Pausanias, [35](#)

Petronius, [33](#)

Philo of Alexandria, [32-33](#), [54-55](#)

Conf., [181n11](#)

On the Decalogue, [32](#)

On the Making of the Cosmos According to Moses, [181nn7,10](#)

Spec, [181nn7,10,11](#)

Philostorgius, [84](#)

Church History, [187n44](#)

Philostratus, [108](#)

Life of Apollonius, [108](#)

Plato, [23-25](#), [30](#), [32](#), [92](#), [153](#)

Laws, [174n84](#)

Republic, [171n26](#)

Timaeus, [170n13](#)

Pliny the Younger

Epistle 10, [201n56](#)

Plotinus, [86](#), [153-54](#)

Enneads, [153](#), [205nn,43,44,46,47](#)

Plutarch, [18](#), [20](#), [25](#), [30](#)

De Iside et Osiride, [173n69](#)

Life of Numa, [30](#)
Parallel Lives, [173n61](#)
Polemon, [128-29](#)
Porphyry, [25](#), [153-55](#)
Life of Plotinus, [188n3](#)
Peri agamalon, [174nn87,88](#), [205n55](#)
Prudentius, [99-100](#), [107](#), [108](#), [130](#), [164](#)
Against Symmachus, [208n35](#)
Peristephanon, [99](#)
Pseudo-Anastasius Apocrisarius
Disputatio inter Maximum et Theodosium, [200n37](#)
Pseudo-Basil
Homily 17, [191n33](#)
Pythagoras, [30](#), [92](#)

Rufinus, [130](#)
Church History, [199n23](#), [207n21](#)

Sallustius
On the Gods, [205n54](#)
Sarapion, [43](#)
Sextus Empiricus, [37](#)
Socrates, [23](#), [30](#)
Socrates (historian), [42](#), [161-62](#)
Church History, [207nn18,21,22,23,25](#)
Sozomen, [42](#), [84](#), [130](#), [161-62](#)
Church History, [179n78](#), [186n42](#), [199n23](#), [207nn18,21,23,24](#)
Strabo, [33](#)
Geography, [33](#)
Sulpicius Severus, [42](#), [50](#), [163](#)
Dialogues, [179n78](#)
Life of Saint Martin, [207n26](#)

Tacitus, [33-34](#)
History, [34](#)
Tertullian, [2](#), [5](#), [7-10](#), [12](#), [22-23](#), [30](#), [38-40](#), [49](#), [58-59](#), [77](#), [116](#), [148](#)
Against Marcion, [9](#)
Against Praxeas, [39](#)
Apology, [23](#), [30](#)

On Idolatry, [7](#), [30](#)
On the Flesh of Christ, [179n65](#), [182n25](#), [195n40](#)
On Modesty, [185n20](#)
On the Spectacles, [171nn35,43](#), [173nn72,75](#)
Scorpiace, [171n39](#)
Treatise Against the Nations, [30](#)
Theodore of Mopsuestia, [136](#)
 Catechetical Homilies, [201n52](#)
Theodore the Studite, [95](#)
 Ref., [190n22](#)
Theodoret of Cyrrhus, [11-12](#), [42](#), [130](#), [161-62](#)
 Church History, [207nn18,20,21,23](#)
 Quest. Ex., [172n49](#)
Theodorus Lector, [119](#)
 Church History, [197n56](#)
Trypho, [39](#), [57](#), [115](#)

Varro, [31](#)
 Antiquities of Divine and Human Matters, [31](#)
Vita Theodore Sycotae, [195n27](#)
Zeno of Citium, [24](#)

Founded in 1893,

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS

publishes bold, progressive books and journals on topics in the arts, humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences—with a focus on social justice issues—that inspire thought and action among readers worldwide.

The UC PRESS FOUNDATION

raises funds to uphold the press's vital role as an independent, nonprofit publisher, and receives philanthropic support from a wide range of individuals and institutions—and from committed readers like you. To learn more, visit ucpress.edu/supportus.

OceanofPDF.com